

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



MARCH 1983

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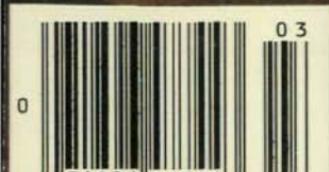


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An Exciting Mike Shayne Adventure
SEARCH AND DESTROY
by Brett Halliday

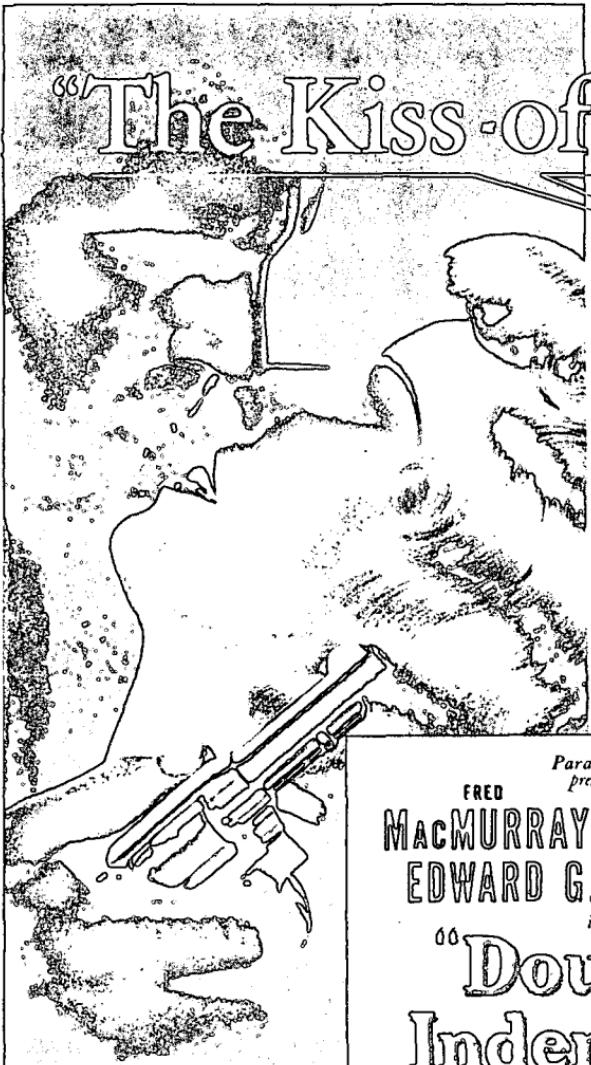
A Leo and Faye Novelet
PRACTICE MAKES MURDER
by Patrick Scaffetti

Short Stories by
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"The Kiss-off!"



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both of them. They
had gone too far...
they had tried to get
away with murder
and they found they
couldn't get away
from me!"

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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MARCH 1983



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SEARCH AND DESTROY

by Brett Halliday

There was a killer out there who was very good at his job. It was up to Shayne to stop this maniac — or die trying! 4

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The man in black kicked the .38 from the redhead's grasp. From his black Army-issue boots to the lampblack smeared on his face, Shayne could see the man was a warrior, a twentieth-century equivalent to the Samurai or Knight Templar, a warrior whose eyes glowed from their black mask, telling the detective that here was a man who was good at what he did — killing!

Search and Destroy

by BRETT HALLIDAY

THE VERY SPANISH-LOOKING HOUSE AT THE BEGINNING OF Larchmont St. had always been special. It was built by a New York lawyer so that every winter he could escape the cold North and a frigid wife. When his Cuban mistress shot him, the house was purchased by a Miami orthodontist who sold enough braces to support it. Next a Sicilian gangster moved in, but the house and the Italian's territory were taken from him by the same shot. Then it went through a famous cosmetics king and a notorious Miami Beach queen before being purchased by "Ginger" Jake L'Argot on the day Nixon resigned.

Of course Gerald Small, though a frequent visitor to Miami, didn't know the history of the house, and at that moment, as the chauffered limousine let him out in front of the ornate doors, he didn't care. Small glanced momentarily at the sprawling mansion, but never saw the inlaid tiles, the genuine gold lamps, or the expensive sculptures that stood guard throughout the massive courtyard.

All Gerald Small knew was that he had done a good job for his employer, and, as a token of Mr. L'Argot's esteem, he had been invited to the fabled home on Larchmont. That marked him as a man, he thought, as anything but small.

HE WAS LAUGHING AT HIS PUN WHEN HIS KNOCK WAS answered by a huge butler in a black suit. The guy was so big, Small decided, that he could have played defensive tackle for his hometown Detroit Lions.

"And how, sire," inquired the imposing figure, "may I help you?"

Detecting a bit of a British accent, Small was puzzled. He didn't know they made Limeys that big. "I, that is, Mr. L'Argot invited me . . . he said . . ."

"If you will pardon me, sir," said the butler, "I shall check inside. Your name?"

"Small, Gerald Small. I'm from the Motor City."

"Aren't they all, sir?"

Gerald Small, standing there in the hot September afternoon sun, fidgeted with his tie and decided he didn't like the British sense of humor. At first he had been disappointed at being sent down to Miami in September. Why couldn't he have gone in January or February? Both months in Michigan turned his privates into ice cubes, he thought as his forehead dripped sweat into his eyes. Of course things had gotten better immediately. First, he had discovered that the man whose computers he had been providing security encryption was L'Argot. Next he had heard the rumors of how the bossman threw "special parties" for favored employees, and finally, when the secret code had been installed, he had received a yellow card with a time and address on it.

"I presume, sir," interrupted the tall butler, "that you have in your possession something you wish to show me."

Something in the servant's delivery made Gerald Small suddenly glad he had the yellow card with him. Why hadn't he showed it in the first place? Ever since that black cat had crossed his path on the way to L'Argot Enterprises that morning he had been nervous.

The butler took his card and said. "Follow me, sir."

THE INSIDE OF THE MANSION SEEMED TO SMALL THE SIZE OF the Silverdome. Gilt-framed paintings that he had seen in his wife's deadly dull art books hung from each wall, and over each was a separate light. Like billboards, he decided. The walls were high and dotted also with blankets and funny little statues in white rock. From

beyond a pair of woodsculptured double-doors he heard light music and lighter laughter.

"Cheerio, Mr. Small. We've been expecting you."

The Detroit cryptographer turned to see a thin man in a tweed suit. With a white beard, white mustache, and long white hair, he looked just like that bust of a man his wife always called The Bard.

"Lord Blythe-Smith," said Small's host, extending his hand. He pulled out a watch on a long chain and added, "Actually, you are a trifle early."

"Well, I finished up at the warehouse sooner than I thought," said Small, noticing he too had a British accent.

"Splendid! To the early bird and all that rot. You shall be the first to choose."

Small had heard through the grapevine the parties were nice, but what was this crap the lordship was feeding him? "Choose?" he said. "Choose what?"

"Why from among my treasures." Blythe-Smith took his arm and led him to the double-doors. Small, who had been in cryptanalysis for over twenty years and computers for a decade, couldn't decipher what was happening.

"Permit me," said his English host, "the Blythe-Smith jewels."

Gerald Small was bedazzled.

STANDING IN A ROOM THE SIZE OF A BASKETBALL COURT were some of the most beautiful women he had ever seen. A Nordic blond in white smiled at him. Behind her was a black woman in a form-fitting dress of dark gauze. The eyes of an Indian girl robed in bright red fixed him. In a blue, almost transparent robe, a well-tanned redhead glanced his way. An Oriental beauty in green perched on a stairway like an exotic bird. It was a global rainbow, and Gerald Small knew he had found the treasure at its end.

"Come," said his host, "let me introduce you to Jade. I believe you have a marked preference for non-Western types."

Almost in a trance the forty-six year old husband from Detroit followed the Englishman across a plush, white carpet. How could the Limey have known? Sure, whenever he went out of town, he preferred Japanese and Chinese women. But they were in San Francisco and Vegas, not Miami. And the only person he had confided his preference in was his shrink.

Blythe-Smith stopped in front of the Oriental. "Mr. Small, this is the exquisite Jade, a priceless part of my collection." She bowed before him, coming so close he could see her breasts. Like large, ripe olives

they were. "I must leave you two regrettably to attend a meeting across the bay. Have a bloody good time."

Before Small could thank his host, the Oriental woman had materialized in his arms. Even through a 60%-cotton suit he could feel how warm she was. "I understand," she said with only a slight trace of an accent, "that you prefer speed to protracted foreplay."

A hairtrigger, Dr. Gould had called it.

"Let us go then, you and I," she said, and began leading him up the winding staircase. "I think I know what you like."

Small doubted it. If she did, she wouldn't have gone along so willingly. There had been the incident in San Diego and the pimp who swore he'd kill him if he ever showed up in New Orleans again.

"You are happy?" she said, as they started down a long corridor.

Usually he was led down a paint-peeled hallway, and normally by now he had been stopped by a cashier who wanted a few extra bills for clean sheets. But usually his excitement wasn't mounting so quickly. An image of an arm at an obscene angle and a bloody face flashed before him. Not here, he thought, not in a high-class place like this.

She stopped and bent over. Inserting a gold key in a green lock, she opened the door slowly. "Perhaps," she whispered, "you will show Jade what you like."

She was asking for it, thought Small. They all were. They all deserved it with their little hands and almond-shaped eyes. He hadn't wanted to do it to them: Aggression transference, Dr. Gould had called it.

Her fingers were on his shirt as the door closed behind them. You can't forget Rusty, the doctor had said over and over, so of course he couldn't forget, not that he wanted to. Forget how an innocent kid had been blown to bits just outside of Saigon by a woman who handed him a picnic basket full of TNT.

SMALL HEARD RUSTY SCREAMING IN FRONT OF HIM, BUT even louder than his only son was a sudden explosion. It was like Vietnam happening all over again. Another explosion. The house on Larchmont shook. The butler was screaming in pain and then a gun fired. More screaming. Geez, it sounded like a real battle. He heard things breaking and smoke drifted into his senses.

He looked down. The beautiful Oriental was gasping in short, quick breaths. He had to make her stop. One time he swung. Then agian.

Dimly he was aware of the door behind him crashing down. Slowly he turned around.

Framed by the doorway was a man in black. His pants and turtleneck

were black. He even had black under his eyes and a black toboggan cap on his head. An ammunition belt with a holster on it wrapped around his midsection. In his hand was a gun, a large rifle, the kind Rusty had carried. The stranger's eyes were blue, and Small had the sensation he could actually feel them boring into him.

The slugs came at him slowly, like the Lions running onto the field in Pontiac. He felt like he could reach out and touch the bullets, even catch them, but he hurt too much.

Dizzy, he fell. Slumped over the bed with the soft, screaming woman below him, he closed his eyes. In his mind he heard Blythe-Smith's last words — "Have a bloody good time."

II

THE GREEN-CLAD HULK RAMMED HIS FOREHEAD INTO THE man in blue's midsection, standing him up and then driving him backwards. Even before he crashed into the turf, he was hit again — and again. The air rushed from his smashed lungs and he bellowed like a maimed bull.

A tumultuous roar rose from around Shayne, and he found himself applauding the Miami defense. They had stopped the Giants on third-and-two at the New Yorker's forty. Watching the visitor's rookie running back being helped off the field, the rangy redhead remembered his own moments on the gridiron and for once didn't miss them.

Shayne hadn't planned on being at the Dolphin's home opener, but the day before he had received a forty-five yard line ticket and an anonymous invitation to the game. The ticket alone would have piqued his curiosity, but even more so had the accompanying note: "How would you like to help an old friend?"

The hot September sun seemed a leech on his pores, and Shayne wondered how much hotter it was on the Orange Bowl's artificial surface. He glanced at the empty seats on either side of him. Here it was the second quarter and still no contact — except on the field.

The Dolphins, in a ten-man line, were obviously going to try to block the Giants' punt. As if in slow-motion, Shayne could see the play developing. It was a fake and the Dolphins bought it. The redhead was on his feet yelling "Left flat" as if they could hear him. The experienced Dolphin special teams, though, was determined only to get to the punter. As they closed in, he lofted a soft pass just over their heads to the left. Like a diagram on a coach's blackboard, the blockers formed around the receiver, who went sixty yards without being touched.

"Sucker play got 'em again," said a voice to Shayne's right.

"If those big heads are gonna make the playoffs, the special teams

are gonna have to come around first." The speaker was on his left.

While Shayne had been preoccupied with the action down on the field, the two men had slipped into the seats on either side of him. Each was wearing a baseball cap, a polo shirt, and dark slacks. Shayne knew he had seen them before, but where?

"I'm Ray March," said the guy on the right. "This is Sid Lesman."

They didn't have to show their badges for Shayne to match their names to a profession. But why, the detective pondered, would two cops treat him to a football game? "Great seats," he said.

"We had to be sure you'd come."

"Your little note made sure of that," said Shayne. "I've seen you around Gentry's cop shop, but neither of you qualifies as an old friend — unless you plan to give me a season ticket for this seat."

The two men laughed and Lesman said, "On our salaries we couldn't afford season tickets to the toilet bowl."

The rejuvenated Giants smeared the Dolphins' return man on his own nine-yard line, and Shayne sensed a rout.

March said, "The old friend that needs help is Will Gentry."

SUDDENLY THE BALL GAME WASN'T IMPORTANT TO SHAYNE. Over the years he and the outspoken Chief of Police had grown closer than most football teammates. They had been through tougher times than goal-line stands and quarterback blitzes. One thing Shayne was certain of — he could count on Will. "What's wrong?" he said.

"What we have here, Shayne, is a very delicate situation," said Lesman.

The three men huddled together in an attempt to shut out the crowd noise.

"Bad cop," said March.

"Isn't that what the I.A. boys are for?"

"It's not that simple," said Lesman. "Internal Affairs means publicity — the press, TV reporters — no matter how hard you try to keep a lid on it. Miami's finest are already about as popular as herpes. And with those three narcs being indicted for selling off evidence from the property room last month, all we need is for one of those pretty talking heads down at Channel Twenty to get wind of an officer going around shooting people."

"A rogue cop," said the redhead. "I hadn't heard."

"That's exactly the point."

The detective rasped a thumbnail across his chin. "In the past when Will Gentry's wanted to talk to me, he's come himself. Why the messenger service?"

"We don't have to tell you how Gentry goes by the book, especially when it was written on high. So when the word came down from City Hall to keep his mouth shut, Gentry did."

Shayne fired up a Camel. "So what gives you guys the right to blab about it?"

"We owe Gentry, and everybody in this town knows how thick you two are. Besides, you're a man who knows how to keep his mouth shut while he works."

The redhead drew deeply. "You must owe Gentry a lot to risk your pensions by talking to me."

"Nuthin' but our asses," said March.

"We got into some trouble over at Vice. Gentry could have flushed us then, but he gave us a chance."

"Assigned us to Homicide directly under him. If a man puts his job on the line for us, could we do any less?"

Lesman showed Shayne the Sunday *Daily News*. "You see the story on page three?" He pointed to the headline: 3 SLAIN IN MASSACRE.

Shayne nodded. "A cop did that? Why?"

"We can't be sure, but we know the house belongs to L'Argot."

"Ginger" Jake."

"Yeah, Mr. Syndicate himself."

"What about the cop you said did it?"

Lesman handed the redhead a game program. "You'll find a complete profile of the guy inside."

Shayne took the program. "What do you want me to do?"

"What you do best — nose around on both sides of the bay. Find Haggard and get the bastard any way you can before he kills again or the word gets out."

Shayne stared at the Goodyear blimp. From up there you had perspective, could see everything down here as it developed. But in the stands he felt his vision cramped and limited. He had never had a case like this. Usually he worked with Gentry even though admittedly this time the situation his friend was in was different.

"I'll look into it," said the redhead, stuffing the program into his back pocket. "And you guys too."

"Fine," said March. "We appreciate it, and so will Gentry when it's over."

"Keep in touch," said Lesman.

The detective paused before the exit. It was just half-time, and the Dolphins were at the short end of a 24-3 score. At that moment, though, he didn't care about the Dolphins. Will Gentry was also on the short end of the scoreboard, and a good friend's skin mattered more

than a pigskin.

III

THE SUDDEN BLARE OF HORNS FROM BEHIND SHOCKED Shayne. A parking lot of people had given up on the Dolphins, and the result was a traffic jam around the Orange Bowl. Some guy in a Volkswagen cut in front of a 280ZX. As the two men climbed out of their vehicles, cursing and shoving, Shayne could see a long wait coming. He lit up a Camel, sat back in the Buick's torn seat, and began to read what the two cops had given him.

It was a photocopy of a personnel file for one HAGGARD, JAMES T., Lieutenant, Head of Special Weapons and Tactics. Age: 36. Marital Status: single. Coral Gables address. Education: college. Military Service: two tours in 'Nam; Purple Heart; CIB; Silver Star; Sergeant, Omega Team (classified Operations Group, "Pentagon confirms as highly effective nullification force").

Shayne wiped the sweat from his forehead. Translation — Haggard was a crack marksman; probably a sniper whose job had been to penetrate the enemy parameter and terminate: Sight enemy, Shoot same.

The detective read on about Haggard's record since his discharge. Spent some time in Frisco. NYPD. Dismissed six months later for "Regrettable judgment" and "excessive force" in eliminating Puerto Rican procurer. Joined Cleveland P.D. Dismissed within the year for border incident involving dead Canadian terrorist found by the R.C.M.P. Hired soon after by the Miami P.D.

Shayne read between the lines. One of Gentry's old friends was a higher-up with the Cleveland force. Could Will have gone out on a limb for a friend — again?

Shayne rolled up his sleeves and continued. Two years with the M.P.D. Distinguished service. No waves. Three commendations for bravery. Promoted to SWAT-leader on the retirement of Lieutenant Chase.

The last line rang a bell. The big redhead remembered the newspaper accounts. Chase had exchanged himself for some hostages in a bank robbery. The three teenagers had tortured the veteran, even becoming so bold as to do it in the bank's front window. Haggard, then second in command, had taken the trio out in a matter of seconds with a .44 AutoMag. The pictures in the *Daily News* had made him a community hero, but the image was frozen in Shayne's mind: a tall man clutching a pistol standing over three punks covered with glass and blood.

Traffic was starting to clear. The redhead pulled onto the street.

Yeah, there was a proverbial thin line between killing within the law and killing outside of it. Had Haggard crossed the line?

Putting the question aside, Shayne tromped on the accelerator. He had a good idea where he could pick up some additional information.

THE REDHEAD KNOCKED ON THE FOURTH-FLOOR DOOR.

"Hang on," called a voice. "Last-second pass . . . the snap . . . he drops back . . . the ball's in the air . . . it's long enough . . . Cefalo catches it . . . T.D."

The scarecrow figure jerked open the door and said, "Hot damn! What a comeback by Miami."

Shayne was incredulous. "You mean they won?"

"They lost."

"Then why are you so happy?"

"They beat the spread. A home dog. Now Bennie the Book is down \$620 to this humble, but always correct prognosticator. The drinks are on me."

Wondering how far the bet had pulled Tim out of the hole, Shayne threw a week's laundry on the floor, removed some food-encrusted plates, and sat down in the overstuffed chair. "If I can revive you from your moribund state, I need some information, and the library's closed."

The thin Irishman handed Shayne a spotted jelly glass filled with Martell. "Your card's always good here."

"What do you know about a little ruckus at 'Ginger' Jake L'Ar-
got's?"

"What ruckus?"

Three guys blown away at some fancy house over on Larchmont."

"Oh," mused Rourke, "I thought that pleasure palace belonged to a high-class pimp named Blythe-Smith." The reporter threw down a shot of whiskey. "And I thought the old bootlegger had retired. So 'Ginger' Jake has his finger in that pie too. Tell me more."

"Not this time, old buddy. Everything's got to be on a need-to-know basis."

"Never thought I'd see Mike Shayne in a government harness. What's this need-to-know crap?"

The redhead only stared at his reporter friend. Shayne's steel-gray eyes said what words didn't: — Trust me.

Rourke took his cue. "O.K., but I don't know too much. I guess after what somebody did to that house the real estate agents won't be showing it for a long while. It was like a military operation — quick and brutal."

"What about the three victims?"

"The gardener was your basic hardman. Did his pruning with a .38 until somebody nipped his bud. The butler was a real strongman from Merry Olde England. It took a bellyfull of slugs to bring down that refugee from the London Zoo. The third guy seems to have been a john from Detroit. Probably down for a little primal sun and carnal fun."

An innocent, thought the redhead. He could see why Gentry was worried. It was beginning to look like Haggard had made a housecall in Miami and that he had indeed crossed the thin line.

ABOUT DUSK SHAYNE CREPT THE BUICK PAST THE CORAL
Gables address that he had seen in the file. The white stucco box looked like all the others that had been thrown up during the 50's except that it had an operating fountain in the front. He drove round the back and parked at the end of the street.

The detective was certain Haggard wasn't home, but maybe he could find something useful in the house. He knocked. No answer as expected. Why not use the old Fuller Brush routine. While talking out loud for the benefit of the neighbors, the detective picked the lock quickly.

Slowly he opened the door.

He heard a click and a thud. Looking down, the redhead saw a live grenade roll between his legs.

IV

THE CLOCK IN SHAYNE'S HEAD HAD REGISTERED LESS THAN
a second when he reacted.

His choices were limited. Yeah, he could turn his back and run and probably make it. But the houses on the block were close, and that meant some innocents might get hurt.

The fountain was a logical option, but the detective wasn't sure that grenades didn't go off underwater.

His hands scooped up the deadly weapon as the mental clock struck one.

Down the hall he ran, finding the room he sought by its stench.

Two seconds gone.

He was lucky. The commode was old with a wide mouth. He tossed in the grenade.

Three seconds.

Shayne flushed.

He ran pell-mell back through the house.

Four.

From the front porch he dove over the fountain.
The explosion never came.

LYING FACE DOWN IN THE BERMUDA GRASS, SHAYNE WONDERED if the green pineapple was a dud. Maybe Haggard had removed the explosives.

After awhile the redhead got up and dusted himself off. In the twilight no one seemed to have noticed his antics, so he headed for the adjacent garage. Its door was unlocked as if someone had left in a hurry. He raised it.

The smell of linseed oil greeted him, the same kind of oil used to store guns. Clean rectangles stood out on the floor amidst the dust. Something had recently sat there. On a workbench Shayne found a mechanical loader, a few bent casings, and a trace of black powder. Haggard had his own little munitions factory. Like a professional sky-jumper who only trusts himself to fold his chute, Haggard was probably making his own rounds to insure they were just what he needed.

Things were falling into place, the redhead was thinking, when he heard a burp. Shayne turned. Standing at the garage entrance was a short guy with a bald head, a beer-belly, black high-top sneakers with no socks, and a rip in the crotch of his plaid bermudas.

"If you're looking for our local NRA rep, you're two days late. Friday night he loaded up that green van of his and cut out with some broad. You the cops?"

Shayne flased his I.D., knowing that if he had said he was a poultry inspector, the guy would have been too tanked to have read it.

"You live around here?" said the detective.

"Across the street." He belched again. "That joker kept me up many a night piddlin' in his garage and revving his engine. I hope he never comes back. Let one wrong guy in and there goes the neighborhood."

Looking at his beer-stained T-shirt and weekend stubble, Shayne guessed local real estate values had already bottomed out.

THE TRUCK FROM PLUMMER CATERING STOPPED AT THE entrance to the Paradise Towers garage. While a guard chatted with the driver, Shayne slipped out of the shadows and into its rear. Getting into a modern-day condo complex without an invitation, decided the redhead, was like breaking the defenses of a medieval castle. Fifty bills had bought him the address of noted man-about-town and pimp Charles Blythe-Smith. The hard part was getting to the twelfth floor.

When the truck slowed down at the second level, Shayne dropped out the back. The elevator was well lit but locked. As he stood there pondering his situation, the detective heard some barking from behind him.

Quickly he turned his back as if just exiting the elevator.

Spotting him, a silver-haired matron called out, "Oh, drat. Shadrak and Mishak, you naughty boys," she said, chiding two finely groomed toy poodles, "see what you've done. You've caused Mommy to miss the elevator. Now I'll have to try to hold you two rambunctuous boys and find my key all at the same time."

Shayne smiled and paused in front of her. "Let me hold these two rascals for you."

"You're too kind," she said. "Now you boys behave yourself in the presence of a gentleman."

Fumbling through a shopping-bag-size purse, she finally found a key. When she opened the door, Shayne stepped in with her.

"Gracious," she said, taking the leashes, "I thought you were leaving."

"I was, but I forgot to kiss my wife goodbye. You see," he said flashing a sheepish smile, "we were just married."

Shayne was glad when she got off at the third floor. He couldn't bear her "isn't young love wonderful" smile much longer.

PARADISE TOWERS WAS APTLY NAMED, THE REDHEAD decided as he walked down the plush-carpeted hall. It didn't seem right that a maggot so obviously bound for hell should live so close to anything remotely connected to heaven. Then again, maybe Blythe-Smith knew where he was headed and was trying to squeeze out any pleasure he could while he was still on earth.

From behind the door to 12C came a commotion. A sharp wail and then a crack. The detective had heard the sounds before, but not in a place like this.

He knocked.

No answer. Only silence.

Shayne knocked again, a little louder.

After awhile the door opened slightly and through a chain a distinguished-looking man with white hair said, "Yes?"

"Mr. Blythe-Smith?"

"I believe you have the advantage."

"Shayne." The redhead deliberately raised his voice. "I want to talk to you about a little incident over on Larchmont last night. We can discuss it out here or in there."

Blythe-Smith removed the chain and let him in. The richly decorated room dripped money. Shayne glanced at the oil paintings, the sculptures, the shelves filled with leather-bound volumes. Classical music played in the background, but he didn't see or hear anybody else.

"What do you know about last night?" asked the small man with a heavy British accent.

"You've got it backwards, pal. It's what you know that counts," said the redhead.

"Raymond, come in here," said Blythe-Smith without raising his voice. "We have a problem, Raymond."

The door to a backroom opened and a huge figure filled it. He had long, dark hair on the top of his head as well as on his face. It looked like one movement from the gorilla would tear his expensive suit to shreds. But he stepped toward the detective anyway.

"Raymond, Mr. Shayne has stumbled into the wrong flat and needs to be shown the proper way out."

"Down the elevator or through the window?" said the hulk.

Well, Raymond certainly helped prove the theory of evolution, thought Shayne. The ape could talk.

From the back room issued a woman's scream.

"Hurry, Raymond! You must get back to Diamond. That jewel needs more polishing before she's shown in public again."

Raymond grabbed Shayne's arm and slowly started to squeeze as he pushed the redhead toward the door.

Making a fist, Shayne snapped his right arm upward, catching his attacker just below the bridge of the nose. Raymond barked like one of the dowager's poodles and released his grip.

Shayne spun loose completely and buried a right in the giant's mid-section. When his opponent doubled over in pain, the redhead took his open palms and simultaneously clapped on both of the bodyguard's ears.

Raymond vomited on Blythe-Smith's elegant carpet and then pitched forward into his own mess. Shayne said, "I hope I didn't disturb the neighbors."

THE FRIGHTENED ENGLISHMAN BACKED INTO THE OPEN room and Shayne followed. It was a huge bedroom complete with a water bed. Tied with adhesive tape in the middle of the rocking bed was a squirming blond. Beside her lay a cotton-covered coathanger and a rolled and wet towel, the kind referred to in a locker room as a rat-tail. Blythe-Smith cowered behind the bed like a kid who was about to be spanked by his father.

Carefully Shayne removed the tape from the blond's wrists and ankles, then slowly unwrapped the rest from over her mouth. The fear in her eyes marred her unquestionable beauty, thought Shayne as she eyed him constantly, unable to make up her mind whether things were going to get better or worse. Gently the redhead massaged her wrists and ankles. The whiteness beneath the skin told him she had been trussed for quite awhile. Why?

Even more pressing was where he went from here. Raymond would waken soon. How much could he get out of Blythe-Smith in that time? His instincts told him to take care of the blond called Diamond first. He looked back at the sniveling Britisher. Something on Shayne's face frightened the blond, and she retreated on the waterbed like a scared pup.

"Who hit the Larchmont place yesterday?" said the redhead.

Blythe-Smith gulped. "I don't know. Believe me I wish I did right now, but I swear to you I departed only moments before the untoward incident."

Shayne stepped toward the man.

"On my mother's sainted grave."

"Give me your keys," said Shayne.

Blythe-Smith meekly handed him a monogrammed leather case.

"I'm taking her out of here," growled the redhead. "If anything happens to her, maggot, there's not a rock big enough for you to hide under, even with Bonzo out there standing guard."

Shayne helped the blond onto the elevator. As they went down, she made her choice. Deciding he was a friend, Diamond leaned against his muscular shoulder. On the third floor the poodleless dowager got on.

Her face lit up immediately as she explained, "Wouldn't you just know that with all the fol-de-rol, I left my brochures from the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in the car."

Shayne grinned back, all the while thinking that if she were interested in defending animals he had a perfect client for her on the twelfth floor.

The dowager flashed that certain smile again.

Shayne put his beefy arm around Diamond's shoulder and pulled her close as the elevator door opened. "Missed her so much," he said as he and the older woman parted, "that I decided to take her with me."

SHAYNE DROVE THE BUICK EASILY DOWN MIAMI'S DESERTED streets. If Sunday were a day of rest, he wasn't looking forward to the rest of the week. The color had come back to Diamond, and Shayne

could see why men shelled out big bucks for that jewel.

"Are you sure you want to go to your sister's?" said the redhead.

"Nobody knows I even have a sister. I'll be safe there. The last two weeks have been hell. Two weeks ago we were busted, and yesterday somebody wrecks my boss's — make that, ex-boss's — playpen, offs a few lice, and it gets taken out on me."

"You were at the house on Larchmont yesterday?"

Slowly she lit up a cigarette, caressing it gently with her full lips. "I've seen dudes crash parties, but this guy comes somersaulting through the French doors and before Lloyd — that's the butler — can get his piece out, this guy in black plugs him three times smack in the forehead. We were scared. I mean, he looked us all over, sort of right through you, but suddenly he turns and runs up the stairs."

"What for?"

"I guess he was after the john from Detroit with the yellow card."

"Yellow card," repeated the detective.

"Yeah. Blythe-Smith's got this friend named Mr. L'Argot, who gives out these yellow cards like dog biscuits to people who do what he wants. When we meet a john with a yellow card, we're supposed to be extra nice, if you know what I mean."

Shayne nodded. "The guy in black found what he was looking for."

"Did he ever. Kicked in Jade's door and blew out Motor City's tires." She flicked the cigarette out the window, scattering hot ash into the warm night air. "I just wish he had gotten there fifteen minutes sooner."

"Why?"

"Maybe he would have given Mr. Blythe-Smith a lead jeweler's eye — smack in the middle of his forehead."

V

MACARTHUR CAUSEWAY UNWOUND BEFORE SHAYNE. THE early-morning sun glowed on the horizon, and the calm surf glistened with gold. Despite getting only a few hours sleep after dropping off Diamond at her sister's, the rangy redhead had risen before dawn. He turned right off the Causeway and crossed a short concrete bridge onto a small island.

"Ginger" Jake L'Argot, who had gotten started running rum and other things that were profitable in the Thirties, had always sunk his money into real estate. Every time the cops had curtailed one of his business interests, he had built a portion of his home literally with his own hands, and now he owned almost the entire island. Pulling up

before the wrought-iron gates, Shayne wondered why the old crook had never named it Key L'Argot.

A burly guy in a double-breasted jacket peered through the gates as if from a cell.

"Morning, Rico," said the redhead. "Jake in the usual place?"

"Sure thing," he said, opening the gate. "He's almost through with the wimp now."

So L'Argot's only son was visiting, thought Shayne, as he went through the familiar ritual of handing over his .38 and being patted.

"Mr. L'Argot's getting disgusted with those kids down at Cran-don." The bodyguard, who Shayne knew had been around since his boss's beginning, pointed toward the island to the south.

"Northern winds," said Shayne, stubbing out his Camel. Nobody smoked cigarettes in the old man's presence.

"Yeah, probably. Mr. L'Argot claims he can get high some nights just by coming outside and breathing."

SHAYNE GRINNED AND STARTED WALKING THROUGH THE lush tropical foliage that surrounded the huge stucco house. When he reached the beachfront, the sun was perched on the Atlantic like a large rooster. The detective followed the concrete path that led along the edge of the seawall till he came to a white-latticed gazebo. His son having left the other way, L'Argot sat there alone in his wheelchair, bundled up in blankets and gazing to the east.

"Hello, Shayne," he said in a voice that sounded as if it rolled out of an oildrum. "You bring me any Cuban cigars?"

The redhead shook his head.

"Didn't think so. Our friend Gentry does his job over on the mainland. If he worked the Beach instead of that Painter schlep, I wouldn't have to smell the punks' marijuana." He coughed. "Give me a drink, will you?"

Shayne picked up the glass of orange juice and put the straw between the old man's cracked lips.

"Thanks," wheezed L'Argot. "Hey, Shayne, you ever read Tennyson?"

"The poetry about King Arthur and his knights?" Shayne replied, recalling a long-ago homework assignment.

"I've been having Rico read me 'Ulysses' a lot lately. Don't laugh. It's about this guy who remembers the good old days of fighting and danger. Only now he's a king, an old man with nothing to do but rule an empire. No more adventure, no more dames. Just an old wife and a

son who doesn't give a damn about him. Richard was just here, completely elated. You know why? He's finally got the whole business totally computerized. Can you imagine that? I mean, if he'd just cut off some guy's finger, that'd be reason to be happy. But computers — shit."

He began coughing and Shayne gave him some more orange juice.

"Anyway," continued L'Argot, "this Ulysses stands up on the crags — that's what they called seawalls in his day — and asks his men to go to sea with him, one more time. The sea. Look at her. Isn't she beautiful? Tell me, Shayne, why would men have wanted to crawl out of that a long time ago? So, I told Richard about Ulysses and his dream. I quote, 'All experience is an arch where-through/Gleams that untravelled world whose margin fades/Forever and forever when I move,' and you know what the wimp says to me? 'Gee, Pop, I didn't know you wanted to go to McDonald's.' Christ, to think he's running the business."

The old man started coughing harder, and Shayne gave him another drink. The redhead knew that L'Argot had gotten cancer and the doctors had told him he had less than a year. That was six years ago.

"O.K., Shayne," said L'Argot after awhile, "you listened to me. My turn?"

The detective sat down in a rusting cast-iron chair and said, "You own a house on Larchmont?"

"Bought it in '74 or '75."

"Do you have any idea who hit it over the weekend and why?"

"Hit? What are you talking about? The place has been nothing but trouble. I bought that little bungalow for Maggie. Course she died a few years later and so Richard got it. Go look that up in city records. Other than that, I, as we used to say, don't know nuthin'."

Shayne got up.

"Come again," said the old man, "but don't forget the Havanas."

The redhead smiled at him.

"Turn me to the south a little more."

The detective did it.

"Thanks. You know something, Shayne? With all my scheming why didn't I figure out a way to have you as my son?"

THIS TIME SHAYNE PARKED DIRECTLY IN FRONT OF PARADISE Towers. He mentally kicked himself for not having thought yesterday that the L'Argot that Blythe-Smith referred to could have been Richard, not old Jake. That mistake wouldn't take long to clear up. The security guard in the lobby was totally engrossed in the intricacies of

the *Playboy* philosophy.

The redhead flashed his credentials. "I need some help. I've got an appointment to see the old broad with the two toy poodles."

"Mr. Grise," mumbled the guard without looking up.

Shayne's temper rose quickly. "If I can interrupt your heavy reading, or is it breathing, I'd like you to buzz her for me."

Still staring at the magazine, the guard dialed a phone number. "Mrs. Grise, some guy named Shayne is here to see you."

"Shayne?"

The detective grabbed the phone. "It's about the S.P.C.A. brochures we were discussing last night in the elevator."

"Oh, do come up, Mr. Shayne." The dowager sounded as happy as if a new breed of poodle had been discovered.

In a single motion the guard signalled Shayne to the elevator and flipped to Miss September. As the uniformed cop read, Shayne noticed his lips were no longer moving — except for intermittent quivers.

ON THE TWELFTH FLOOR THE DETECTIVE WAS CONTEMPLATING kicking in the door to 12C when his trained ears picked up the soft pop. And then another. He kicked.

The door splintered and gave way. Just inside, Raymond was lying on his back and staring up with the startled look of a kid who has just been told there's no Santa Claus.

Shayne pulled the .38 from the small of his back and headed for the bedroom. He heard a gurgling sound.

Blythe-Smith was lying across the bed, from which the water spouted up as if a geyser.

The sliding-glass door to the balcony stood open. Cautiously Shayne stepped outside. Caught in the wroughtiron railing was a blackened grappling hook. The redhead looked over the edge.

A rope dangled to the alley below. At the rope's end Shayne saw a figure in black drop to the pavement and sprint to a green van. As the vehicle tore away, the detective, realizing he had no chance to pursue, walked back into the bedroom.

Shayne stood over the water-soaked pimp, who stared up at him through three eyes, the middle one seeping blood.

Diamond had gotten her wish.

VI

TEN MINUTES EARLIER SHAYNE HAD GIVEN UP TRYING TO hold his breath.

"How can you do that to your stomach, Pipe?" said the redhead.

Watching the head of Missing Persons smear strawberry jam on a bagel already smothered with cream cheese and sardines, the detective wondered if the information he was getting was worth the price his nostrils had to pay. "So," he continued, "you're telling me Lesman and March are clean."

"As far as I know. But if you want the real story, you'll have to ask Gentry."

Shayne wasn't ready for that yet. To ask any such questions would tip his old friend as to what he was doing.

"Course," added Sergeant Piper while wiping his mouth with a yellowed handkerchief, "that'd be hard now. Hew was subpoenaed to testify at some trial in Atlanta. Not sure when he'll get back."

"Know anything about the incident on Larchmont?"

Piper filled his mouth with pickled peppers and talked through them. "Vice really screwed up what should have been a righteous case. Gentry got caught in the middle. D.A. couldn't prosecute and so we cut them loose."

"The drug bust is ancient history," said Shayne. "What about the killings over there Saturday?"

Piper stopped in mid-munch. "I'm not supposed to say a word, so I'll just give you what you called about." The sergeant pulled out a computer printout that had been doubling as a placemat and handed it to Shayne. "I don't have to tell you not to let anybody know where you got this."

Shayne nodded. Looking down at the sheet stained with mustard oil and jam, he said, "No way anybody could figure out my source from this."

SHAYNE SWIRLED THE MARTELL AROUND IN HIS DIXIE CUP AS he went back to his desk. The psychological profile, which he wished he had the luxury of checking with the V.A., was atypical of a Vietnam vet. Maybe if Haggard had come back to an assembly line, his problem would never have surfaced. But how did you tell a man it was peace-time now when you gave him back his gun and sent him into the violent world of inner-city crime?

The whole mess started while Haggard was still in Southeast Asia. A blowup in Saigon. Something over a girl in a bar. And the trouble followed him back home. New York. Cleveland. It was always the same. Haggard functioned perfectly, until some incident set him off.

"Tim," Shayne heard his brunette secretary calling out as the door to his inner office burst open, "Michael said he didn't want to be disturbed."

"He will for this."

Shayne looked up to see the willowy reporter shaking a newspaper. Rourke threw the evening edition down on the detective's cluttered desk. "O.K., Mr. Trust-me Officer," spat out the visitor, "I need to know what you know."

Shayne glanced at the headline — ROGUE LOOSE IN MIAMI. Beneath it was a story by his friend explaining that the *Daily News* had received a letter from a man claiming responsibility for the Larchmont massacre.

The detective read an open letter to "the concerned citizens of the city." In it the writer said, "Organized crime has thrown down the gauntlet. If the authorities refuse to accept the challenge, I will." Shayne continued, "I have started my holy crusade by closing a citadel of degeneration. Let the purveyors of iniquity beware, for they are but a heartbeat from hell." It was signed "The Rogue."

The detective looked up at his friend. "This might as well be yesterday's newspaper."

"What do you mean, shamus?" said Rourke.

"Just this morning your Rogue punched two more tickets to hell." With that he explained to the reporter what had happened at Blythe-Smith's condo, including the hour spent answering homicide's questions.

The intercom buzzed and Lucy said, "Michael, you have a call. She says her name is Diamond."

Shayne picked up the receiver. "Hi. You doing O.K. after last night?"

"So far so good. It feels strange to be back in the real world after a few years of exile at that fantasy island on Larchmont."

"Blythe-Smith won't be booking any more reservations for there, or anywhere. That guy in black terminated his lease this morning."

After remaining silent for a moment, she said, "Then it really is over. I owe you, Shayne, and I know you're not the kind of guy who can be repaid my usual way, so I did a little calling around. If you want to talk to Jade — she's the girl who was with the Detroit john when he got wasted — I have her address."

Shayne copied it down. "Keep in touch," he said with his customary sincerity. "Let me know how the real world works out."

"Thanks. I just wish I had met a guy like you years ago. It might have . . ." She hung up without finishing.

As the redhead put down the receiver, he knew she'd already come a long way from fantasy island. For a moment he grew pensive.

"What was that about, shamus?" interrupted Rourke.

"A new beginning, I hope, but I don't want to talk about it." He fired up a Camel and rose from his chair.

"Where are you going?" asked the wiry Irishman.

Shayne answered simply, "To Saigon."

SAIGON WEST, SITTING ON THE SOUTHWESTERN FRINGE OF Little Havana, was another of those refugee pockets that had become countries in themselves. While some immigrants simply camped out on the beach or friendly doorsteps, the Vietnamese had retreated inward. Shayne parked the Buick on the enclave's edge and walked it. The streets themselves were covered with makeshift tents and street vendors with ever-fearful, ever-shifting eyes. The redhead strode between the squatting figures, feeling something like a modern-day Dulliver amidst the Lilliputians. Periodically he showed the address to one of the dark-haired street people. Some would just shrug, others would turn away from him as though he were a leper, and occasionally a silent hand would direct him deeper into the Oriental beehive.

The sun had dropped behind the gray, hostile tenements, and Shayne found himself walking down another alley. Looking at the crumbling walls and boarded windows, the redhead had a sense of what Saigon must have looked like in the last days of the American pullout.

Shayne paused in a doorway on which appeared spray-painted numbers that matched the ones Diamond had given him. He raised his hand to knock when a banshee scream pierced him as deeply as a well-placed stiletto.

VII

SHAYNE'S HEAD SNAPPED AROUND.

The short Vietnamese stood in the middle of the alley, his bare feet spread and his open hands cocked in a boxer's stance. He was wearing a black outfit bound around his midsection by a black sash.

The redhead had confronted these Oriental fighters before. Recalling the assassins of Black Lotus, he knew not to take size as a measure of weakness. It was the eyes, always the eyes that bespoke their ability.

And in these coal-black eyes Shayne saw a well-trained fighting machine.

"I'm looking for Jade," said the redhead.

The Oriental stood as silent and motionless as an onyx figurine.

You watched the eyes, Shayne thought. The eyes. Barely perceptible.

the black eyes shifted to his own chest.

Shayne brought his hands up.

The attack was swift. In a single motion the fighter lept to within reach of the redhead.

Shayne swung.

Effortlessly his opponent moved his head slightly to the right, just enough to cause the detective's blow to miss.

Before Shayne could recover his balance, the black-garbed figure whipped his leg toward the redhead's stomach. Shayne stiffened as the blow arrived. He felt himself lifted from the ground by its force. He sprawled against the hot brick wall.

Lightning struck again as the fighter spun to deliver a crunching back-kick to Shayne's side. The redhead felt his ribcage give. How could such a small man release such raw power?

Shayne knew he had to react fast and accurately. Timing his punch with perfection, he lashed out a sharp right. His fist travelled but inches before catching his adversary on the chin. He heard a crack as the fighter tumbled to the garbage-strewn concrete.

The detective advanced toward the fallen figure. Without notice the prostrate fighter swung his leg behind the startled redhead, toppling him to the pavement.

Shayne rolled and came up in a crouch.

His opponent flicked a kick at his head with the suddenness of a striking viper. Shayne blocked it upward. A roundhouse kick came at him, but the detective stayed in his crouch and parried it just as easily.

Both men were breathing hard. His muscles aching, Shayne kept his concentration.

He saw the flying kick. Ducking ever-so-slightly, he raised his fist.

The Oriental grunted, struck in the place that for all men is soft and vulnerable. Shayne watched as the fighter tried to gain self-control, and when he dropped his hands, the redhead swung.

Shayne was overanxious. His punch grazed the stubble at the end of his opponent's chin, and as it continued into space, the smaller man retaliated.

With a "keee-eeeyyye," his right hand punched forward, then his left. Like pistons his arms extended from his unmoving shoulders, driving Shayne backward.

The redhead was bleeding from the mouth, and he knew if he got out of this one he was going to spend some more uncomfortable hours with the dentist. He expected the Oriental to charge, but like himself, the man was tired.

They swung simultaneously, each catching the other in the fist and

tearing skin from the knuckles. The pain wrapped itself around Shayne and began to tighten. Shayne blinked and shook his head, but the pain and partial darkness stayed. He reached into the small of his back, but the .38 was gone, lying somewhere in the alley.

He did the only thing he could. If he was a wounded bull, why not act like one? The detective lowered his head and charged.

As he did, the Oriental brought his knee upward. There was an ugly thud, and both men dropped to the alley ground. Neither moved.

SHAYNE WASN'T SURE HOW LONG HE HAD BEEN DAZED, BUT when things started to come back into focus he could tell he was surrounded. Their bodies shimmered in a tightening circle. They were all wearing black trousers and collar-less, button-up shirts.

The redhead struggled to his knees and shook his head. One figure approached him, carrying a black staff. Shayne felt like someone high on drugs — aware of what was happening but powerless to do anything about it. He blinked. The staff had a snake's head with its mouth open and its fangs bared.

"De de mao," called out a voice.

"De de mao," shouted another till it was picked up as a chant.

Feeling like he was caught in the middle of a ritual exorcism, Shayne forced himself to focus on the man standing over him. He was obviously Vietnamese. His black hair was oiled down and brushed back. Had he been younger, he would have looked to Shayne like an Oriental version of James Dean.

"We have much dislike for you and your kind," said the man as the chant ceased. "Can you blame them for telling you to go to hell? We come to this land of plenty and are herded like cattle into this." He gestured around. "In its worse days our Saigon had more pity than your Miami."

Shayne pulled himself to his feet, noticing for the first time that his opponent still lay on the ground. He was being attended by an elderly woman and several children.

"You fight well," said the man who the detective decided must be the group's leader. "You have fought Vo with honor, not like those others with their guns."

"Others with guns?" said Shayne with a great deal of curiosity.

"Two whites, like yourself. They came less than an hour ago."

"For Jade?" His head throbbed and his muscles ached.

"What else would two men want from us? Our dog meat?"

Shayne glanced at the women in the group. Short, flat-chested, and nearly without hips, they hid their eyes beneath conical, bamboo hats.

"Jade was the only child of my sister," continued the leader. "She was abandoned once when her father, an officer in the French army, left and once when her mother died in the provinces. You can see Jade's father in her height and her Western face. She is different, but she is ours. She came to us for help — now she is gone."

Nothing green can stay, thought the redhead. "You sound like this is the first time you've seen her in a long while," he said.

"Since Saigon. She has known for awhile we await her here, but she can not escape Tu Do Street."

Shayne's face bespoke his puzzlement.

"In Saigon it is the place for her kind, tea girls. She dishonors us still, but she is still ours."

Shayne understood now. Her job training had begun in Southeast Asia. A woman stepped forward and placed a plate of rice and fish in front of him. The redhead was struck by a disgustingly pungent odor.

"Nuoc mam," said his host, indicating the sauce.

The redhead shook his head. Had he been starving, he couldn't have eaten. "If I return tomorrow morning," he asked, "could I get one of you who saw the two men with guns to go with me and look at some pictures?" That would be the earliest he could get at Gentry's mug books.

Behind the old man a child tugged on his sleeve persistently. "I will go," said the leader, and bent over. The boy whispered in his ear. "He tells me the two men were not the only ones to visit us."

Shayne had a good idea of the answer when he said, "What did this other look like?"

The old man and the boy exchanged a few words in Vietnamese. "He says dressed in black was the man and he drove a truck like your soldiers — all in green."

VIII

SHAYNE THANKED THE TWO PATROLMEN WHO HAD AGREED to take Lam Duc back to Saigon West. The redhead had offered the old man some money, but was refused with a polite, "Thoi — no You just bring Jade back. Then we are . . . even."

Shayne went back into the station. As Gentry was still testifying in Atlanta, he waited till a cute public defender surrendered the pay phone, and dialed Key L'Argot.

"Mr. L'Argot's," answered the voice that the detective recognized as Rico.

"Jake available?"

"Shayne?"

"Yeah."

"Tween you and me the boss ain't himself lately."

"His son?" said Shayne.

"You wanna talk about ingratitude. Mr. L'Argot's been wiping the kid's nose all his life. Gives the kid the business and the kid won't give him the time of day. And you know what else? It pisses the old man off that the kid treats the operation like we was one of those fancy companies."

"Rico, where can I see the kid?" the rangy redhead asked, feeling a little deceptive. Rico would think one thing, but Lam Duc had identified the two men who took Jade as "known associates" of Richard L'Argot.

"You could try the office on Collins Avenue, but he's not around there lately. He's been spending a lot of time down by the docks putting some fancy equipment in a warehouse." He gave the big detective an address. "Hey, Shayne, do me a favor and kick some sense into the kid."

Shayne knew it was the least he would do.

THE SMELL OF BURNED DIESEL FUEL MINGLED WITH SEA AIR as Shayne walked through the payloaders and longshoremen. Most of his life the redhead had been around the docks. Yeah, these guys were crude brutes with dirty, unshaven faces and even dirtier mouths, but they were also basic men who gave you a day's work for your pay, a dying breed.

The huge wooden warehouse he was seeking sat at the end of the roadway and so did a dark-blue sedan. A pair of familiar faces sat staring out at the dirty water.

Shayne came up silently behind them and placed his meaty hand on the rolled-down window. "You guys here on duty or just come for the view?"

The two detectives looked surprised.

"Shayne, what the hell?" said March.

"What are you doing here?" echoed Lesman. "Get in quick."

As he climbed into the car, the big redhead said, "You're avoiding the question."

"Stakeout," said March, who was munching on a candy bar. "This place belongs to . . ."

"Richard L'Argot," Shayne interrupted. "You been here long?"

"Since a little after dawn," said Lesman.

"Anything happen?" asked Shayne.

"No," said March, unwrapping a Powerhouse, "but we got a tip

that Haggard might show up. Since you haven't done shit finding our self-styled Rogue, and since the shit's about to hit the public fan, we decided to spring into action as they say in the movies."

"We answered your question, Shayne," said Lesman. "Now why are you here?"

"L'Argot's men took a girl and probably brought her here. I think she's the key to the whole thing." Shayne opened the rear door. "You guys can sit here and watch the seagulls fertilize the waterfront, but I'm going in. The girl's in trouble."

Shayne got out of the sedan and started toward a side door to the warehouse.

"Wait up," called Lesman. "Hey, I'm sorry, Shayne. Ray and I are just on edge. He's gonna go around front. I'll stick with you."

"Let me know if I do anything illegal," said Shayne with a wry grin.

HE PICKED THE LOCK WITH HIS WARRANT, AND IN SECONDS they slipped inside. At the opposite end of the partitioned building and down a long hallway, he saw a dim light. They started toward it, slowly and silently, with Shayne in the lead.

After about thirty yards the redhead pulled his Smith & Wesson from the small of his back. He stepped into the large, shadowy open area. To his left he heard low voices. Standing in the shadows he looked around. At either end of a catwalk about twenty feet up a hardman holding a rifle stood guard. They seemed to be expecting trouble. Had March and Lesman's informant been right?

As Shayne inched toward the voices, a single shot echoed off the metal walls. Behind him Lesman grunted. The redhead wheeled around.

Lesman lay silently on the cool concrete slab, his Police Special still clutched in his right hand.

Suddenly all hell broke loose.

A single voice called out, "red blanket, red blanket."

A shot.

Shayne watched one of the hardmen pitch forward from the catwalk. The body splattered on the concrete about the same time the rifle's echo reached the redhead.

"Cover me!" yelled someone.

"Get her inside," cried out another.

A whistling sound arced over the big detective. A thud, and the huge warehouse lit up like a movie set.

Shayne lay still in the shadows, knowing that looking up and around would only blind him.

Then the smoke started billowing toward him. Rolling in his direction, it resembled the fog moving in on the docks at night, except that it was green, twice as thick, and smelled awful.

A girl screamed.

A gun chattered loudly. Shayne, having watched Gentry's SWAT boys work out enough times, knew the sound. The AR-15 was not a weapon to go up against with a .38. It could spit out 5.56 mm slugs at 700 rpm.

A pistol spoke back.

The AR-15 punished it.

Someone screamed.

At the very apex of the warehouse, Shayne detected muzzle flashes. The warehouse had been a trap all right, but the Rogue had ambushed the trappers.

BEHIND HIM HE HEARD FOOTSTEPS RUNNING DOWN THE
hallway he had just come up. The lanky detective started crawling back to the hallway. Down it a door slammed, but he caught sight of it — third on the left.

A hardman ran out into the hallway from another room. He twisted to the concrete before he had taken three steps as a shot echoed from above.

Those who live by the sword, thought Shayne. For years guys like L'Argot's men pushed around who they wanted. A little show of force brought lessened resistance. But, hell, these hoods were amateurs, and the professional up on the ramparts was providing a pretty deadly sermon on the text war is hell.

The redhead knew it was just a firefight. The cops would be here soon, so his job was to hold out, to survive. That wouldn't be an easy task. He was caught between two armies, even if the attacking force consisted of only one man.

The detective was slithering down the hall like a reptile when he heard a machine gun open up on the right. Suddenly there was an explosion. As metal and flesh shards flew over his head, Shayne knew another of L'Argot's men had bought the farm.

He reached the third door on the left, opened it. The central office. A door to the outside cracked, and Richard L'Argot scurried out. Yeah, the good old days of the captain going down with the ship were another thing like Moxie that had disappeared.

A hardman in the room spotted Shayne in the doorway and drew a bead on him.

The redhead fired. The man slammed into a metal file cabinet.

Where was the girl they had been talking about? Obviously caught by surprise, they had tried to retreat this way.

A cool breeze struck his face, and Shayne looked right to see a ventilator. Heavy air conditioning for heavy machinery.

The redhead kicked the ventilator covering. Another blow tore it loose.

He crawled in.

Spools of tape turned and rows of lights flashed hypnotically. A massive computer. The wimp's dream. The noise must have covered the redhead's entrance. Standing across the room, a tagman in a tan suit had a pistol in one hand and his other cupped around the mouth of an Oriental woman.

The missing Jade.

On one knee Shayne commanded, "Drop it, pal!"

The girl came round as a shield, and the guy's gun went to her forehead. "One move," he said, "and she's dogmeat."

Shayne's only motion was the barely perceptible squeeze of his Chief's Special.

The hardman's face never registered that the slug had taken him to the place for which war was only a metaphor.

The girl screamed, her small voice building to the high-pitched sounds of battle.

"Easy," said the redhead, coming up to her. "I'm a friend."

She seemed momentarily relieved to see him coming. Then, she glanced over his shoulder, past him. Her face turned to terror. "No, James! No!"

The redhead wheeled to see the man in black. It was too late.

The Rogue opened up with his AR-15, and Shayne was in the direct line of fire.

IX

SHAYNE THREW HIMSELF AGAINST JADE. AS THEY LAY there on the rough, gray carpet, the detective heard the bullets smash into the bank of computers. The smell of burnt cartridges was more pungent than Jade's perfume.

All grew quiet and as Shayne looked up, the man in black kicked the .38 from the redhead's grasp. From his black Army-issue boots to the lampblack smeared on his face, Shayne could see the man was a warrior, a twentieth-century equivalent to the Samurai or Knight Templar. The warrior's eyes glowed demonically from their black mask, telling Shayne that here was a man who was good at what he did — killing.

His AR-15 still trained on the detective, he fastened a plastique bomb to the side of a shredded metal terminal. "Better get out of here. You've got less than a minute before this rat-hole is nothing but a bad memory."

Shayne, without looking back, didn't hesitate to help Jade over to the ventilator opening and follow her through. In the office she collapsed. To save time he picked her up and in the fireman's carry bolted through the door that L'Argot had used.

Despite his load the redhead found himself sprinting away from the half-gutted building. A few bystanders had gathered to gawk. "Get away," Shayne yelled as he waved his free hand. "It'll blow any second."

The big redhead was three steps across the road when the Rogue's bomb exploded, shattering the computer and Richard L'Argot's dream into a thousand pieces.

AFTER A FEW BLOCKS SHAYNE LOOKED OVER FROM THE driver's seat to see Jade had regained consciousness. Her dark hair matted down with sweat and her face smudged with grime, she was a far cry from being one of the jewels in Blythe-Smith's treasure chest. Still, she possessed the kind of beauty that men would die for — especially one.

The redhead lit two Camels and handed her one. "You and James go back a long way, don't you?" he said. "All the way to Tu Do Street."

Past the point of being terribly surprised at what men did or said, she replied, "James has always been a romantic. I, *au contraire*, am a realist. That's where the trouble began. When his captain reluctantly married us, I thought James understood that it was for *beaucoup* bucks, not love. After all, Ho Lu told me he was paying James ten thousand dollars."

"Wait a minute. You were part of some kind of marriage ring. A GI is given a lot of money to marry a Vietnamese girl. She automatically gets American citizenship without having to go through years of red tape."

"You plenty smart, Joe," she said mockingly, drawing the life out of her cigarette.

"This Ho Lu is a pimp," Shayne continued, "but on a large scale. As soon as you get into this country, you kiss your GI goodbye and become a working girl. The whole thing's a simple bargain."

"Unless . . ."

"The soldier falls in love with the girl."

"James refused to let go. Ho Lu put me to work in a San Francisco

chicken farm. It was bad — but no worse than making boom-boom on Tu Do."

"Then Haggard rode in on his white charger and freed you from the Oriental dragon."

"So I moved on."

"Yeah, to New York, Cleveland, and finally Miami."

For once she was surprised. Shayne knew he had read between the lines wrong earlier.

Jade took another cigarette from his coat pocket and lit up. "It's been the same everywhere. No sooner do I get established than James shows up and causes trouble."

"Trouble, yeah. Killing your Puerto Rican 'sponsor' in New York, offing your Canadian old man in Cleveland, and Saturday ringing down the curtain on Blythe-Smith." It struck him that she had probably been the woman seen in Haggard's van last Friday night. Maybe Haggard had taken her from Blythe-Smith, she had gone back, and he had struck. No matter.

She laughed. It was a tinny, mechanical sound that rang with cocktail-party sincerity. "How," she wondered, "is a girl to make an honest living with a guardian angel like that around?" She reached over and put her hand on his thigh. "And how should I thank you — sunny-side up or easy over?"

Shayne wheeled the Buick to the side of the road. The old man with the slicked hair sitting there on the edge of Saigon West, probably where the squad car had dropped him, looked like an Oriental figurine.

Jade stared disdainfully at the squatting figure. "I left my past on the other side of the Pacific. I don't want t go back."

Shayne reached out and opened her door. "Why don't you talk to him. You might find out you never left it."

ALL THE WAY TO THE END OF MACARTHUR CAUSEWAY
Shayne had kept the pedal to the floor. His discussion with Jade had brought the faint outlines of an indistinct form into a distant pattern. In the midst of his crusade, Haggard started at the bottm of the garbage heap and worked his way up, and there was still the man at the top of the heap.

Shayne plowed the Buick through the closed gates of Key L'Argot. As he lept from the car and started for the foliage, he spotted the brown-suited figure sprawled beside the garden gate. The detective rolled him over.

Rico never had a chance. His .45 was still snuggled in its shoulder holster beneath the moth-eaten double-breasted suit. Shayne closed

the old warhorse's eyes. Blood oozed thick from the small-caliber hole below his monogrammed pocket handkerchief. It was not like Rico to be taken so much by surprise.

As he crept between the tulip trees and spanish bayonet, Shayne was uneasy. Something was wrong.

When the redhead reached the concrete seawall, he heard a voice amidst sporadic coughing, but it was too indistinct to make out words. He vaulted over the edge silently and slipped along the beach created by low tide. The voice grew more discernible.

"They say for everything there's a season, old man, and this, this is the season of death."

Shayne crawled closer. He drew the .38 he had taken from the metal box under the Buick's front seat.

The white gazebo glistened in the noonday sun. Through the latticed side, the redhead could see that the figure holding a pistol and blowing smoke in Jake L'Argot's face wasn't who he had expected.

It was the wimp, Richard L'Argot.

X

JAKE L'ARGOT TRIED UNSUCCESSFULLY TO FAN AWAY THE smoke coming from the cigarette that his son held upwind. He started coughing, and as he spasms racked his body, he jerked violently in his wheelchair as if controlled by an epileptic puppeteer.

Shayne continued to inch forward.

"You were never any good, Richard," spat out the old man. "Always a . . . a . . ."

"Wimp. Isn't that the word you and Rico and the rest of the boys used openly?"

"Rico was even more of a son than you." Jake L'Argot's eyes seemed to glow with the last spark of youth. "I put you through that fancy school, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. M.I.T. I set you up in Boston. A clean job, a job away from me so your mother is happy. But you, never satisfied, you had to return. It killed her."

Richard L'Argot stubbed out the cigarette on his father's unparalyzed hand. The old man never flinched. "To show you, Pop. To show you I am a man too. Not a man like those you ran with, but a man nonetheless."

"I never said you weren't." Old L'Argot stared at the ocean impassively.

"You ridiculed me. I dragged your business into the twentieth-century economic scene, and you ridiculed me!" He waved the gun in front of the wheel-chaired figure's nose.

"Not me, not then." The old man turned to his son and laughed. "But I ridicule you now. You will make me notice. How? By killing me." His body began to laugh with a dry, throaty quality.

"Stop it!" Richard cried out.

"Why? I knew how to live. I know how to die."

"They'll blame it on that cop the papers call the Rogue."

Shayne peered over the seawall and pointed his gun. The two men were less than fifteen feet away. "There'll be nothing to blame him for," the redhead announced.

Richard L'Argot moved quickly for a man with his bulk. He knelt down putting his father between himself and the detective.

"Drop it!" said Shayne. "You O.K., Jake?"

"Happy like Ulysses. Where are you, Shayne? I don't see too good."

"Down in the crags."

"Shut up," yelled Richard.

"That will bring Rico," said the wheelchaired figure.

"Fraid not, Jake," said Shayne. "Looks to me like Richard walked up to your old friend and blew him away at close range."

"This is true?" said old L'Argot.

"Aren't you proud of me, Pop?" sneered the rotund figure from his crouch. "I finally got up the nerve to take a life."

"Shayne, I want one last voyage," said Jake.

The redhead watched in disbelief as the old man struggled upward in his seat and miraculously pitched himself forward. He smashed into his just-as-surprised son. "Punk," coughed the old man. "Punk!"

Caught off-guard, Richard L'Argot tried to back up. But his father rolled into him, knocking him over and into the gazebo's lattice-work. All the fallen figure could do was to raise up on one knee. Slowly he put his gun to his father's motionless head.

Shayne caught him just under the left ear with a .38 slug. He wasn't taking any chances.

"Ginger" Jake L'Argot twitched. His right hand inched forward till it came to rest on his son's warm, red temple, and he cried, first slowly and then uncontrollably.

SHAYNE LEANED AGAINST ONE OF THE BLACK AND WHITES and drew upon a Camel. He had called Painter's office immediately, not so much to report the homicide but to get some protection for Jake. Haggard was still on the loose.

Deblin came out through the large double-doors Shayne knew old

Jake had crafted himself. "Painter's not gonna like it, Shayne, but L'Argot corroborates your story."

At that moment the redhead's mobile phone sounded. He picked it up.

"Shamus," came a familiar voice, "where the hell you been? I've been trying to get you for hours."

"Sorry, Tim. Been tied up."

"I've got some things we gotta talk about. You've been holding out on me."

"O.K., Tim, this might be the best time for it." He gave the reporter his location and hung up.

Deblin was standing beside him. "Old Jake wants to see you, Shayne. Listen, I've called an ambulance, but I don't know. The old guy's hurt pretty bad, and he wasn't in such good shape to start with."

Shayne nodded and marched through the front door, down the hallway, and past some uniformed cops who were checking out Jake's gun collection. When he entered the bedroom, it wasn't what he expected. Some men got religion late in life — Jake got books. Lots of them. They were stacked around the huge bedroom on shelves and in cartons. Jake himself lay on a simple bed he had probably made too.

He coughed. "Hello, Shayne." His voice was dry and his eyes were filmy, half-closed.

"Hi, Jake. You wanted to see me?"

"Yeah. Surprised at this place? Different from the backroom at that waterfront dive where we had our first run-in."

"A lot different," said the redhead as he smiled at the memory.

"After Maggie died and Richard went off, you can see Rico wasn't my only friend." He gestured around the room. "There's my good pal David Copperfield. Huck Finn's over there. You oughta meet Ivanhoe some time — quite a guy." The effort was difficult, and he began spasmodic coughing.

"They've called an ambulance, Jake."

"Not for me they haven't. I don't want a bunch of tubes and wires from some fancy machine making me work."

Shayne couldn't argue with the old man's feelings.

"About the boy. If I had been in your shoes, I'd a pulled the trigger too, probably a little sooner. You didn't take him from me. I lost him a long time ago."

Shayne nodded; "Thanks," as he watched the old man's body shake uncontrollably.

"I owe you, Shayne. I don't know if it'll help, but when you asked me yesterday about the house on Larchmont, I should've explained all of

what I meant by it being trouble. If Richard wanted to sell women, well nobody gets hurt, but I argued with him about using that house as a pharmacy, to sell drugs. Two weeks ago there was a big bust there. Gentry had to let Richard go because the vice officers moved in before the warrant arrived. What Gentry didn't know was that the cops screwed up on purpose. They were yellow-carded."

"In Richard's pocket," said the detective.

"All the way. You're a smart guy, Shayne, and I bet no one ever sent you to M.I.T."

"You know who the two cops were?"

"Since Richard took over, he doesn't let me know dick." L'Argot coughed so hard his bed shook. It took several minutes for him to recover. "I'm about ready to cross the bar, old friend. You wanna do one more thing for me?"

"Name it."

Jake L'Argot placed his hand on a leather-bound book. Shayne picked up the volume of Tennyson and opened it to the bookmark. Slowly he began to read "Ulysses," finding himself putting more and more into it. Gradually he understood. He finished with "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

"Ginger" Jake L'Argot lay there silently, his eyes closed, but somewhere Shayne had a feeling the old man's eyes were open, staring wide-eyed at a horizon that never faded.

XI

ROURKE WAS STANDING BY THE BUICK WHEN SHAYNE CAME out of the house.

"I don't suppose a reporter of your stature still does obits, Tim," said the redhead.

"It's like riding a bicycle, shamus."

"What was it you wanted to talk about?"

"Gentry just got back into town. He's up at his house sleeping, too tired from testifying to talk to the press. So you're gonna talk to me, starting with that little war down at L'Argot's warehouse this morning."

"What do you know about it, Tim?"

"Only what I read in the papers." He threw down the early edition of the *Daily News* on the hood of the Buick and pointed to a column in the middle of the page. "Why is it I'm sure you were there this morning and know what he's talking about?"

Shayne saw it was another open letter from the Rogue. He read, "The pack of dogs is wiped out, but the only way to stop them com-

pletely is to cut off the head of their leader." It was exactly what he thought Haggard would do, but then another idea struck him. "Get in," he shouted to the reporter, already slipping behind the wheel of the Buick.

"Where are we going?"

"To stop a sucker play."

As they headed north, Shayne had Rourke get Sgt. Piper of Missing Persons on the phone. In a moment the skinny reporter handed him the receiver.

"Pipe, Shayne. Need a big favor. Call the morgue for me." Quickly Shayne outlined what he needed, then hung up.

The redhead kept the accelerator as close to the floor as he could, which wasn't very fast. The late-afternoon shoppers and sightseers made Collins an obstacle course.

"What was that about?" Rourke said after awhile.

"A hunch," said Shayne.

THEY RODE NORTHWARD MOSTLY IN SILENCE. THE FAINT outlines were pretty distinct now. Unfortunately the holy grail at the end of Haggard's crusade was a fake, but as Shayne pulled into Bal Harbour he wondered if he could make it in time to convince Haggard of that.

The phone sounded again. Shayne listened awhile and said, "So they did find a yellow card in his personal effects down at the morgue. Thanks, Pipe."

"Your hunch pay off?" said Rourke.

"Part of it."

Shayne pulled down the palm-lined avenue. The lavish homes stood proudly, offering an escape from the violent streets of the city. The redhead stopped in front of the familiar house that had been the recent blue-ribbon winner on the Flower & Garden Club annual tour. He lept out, hoping against hope that the second part of his hunch was wrong.

Rourke was shocked at the stop. "What are we doing at Will Gentry's?"

In an instant Shayne scanned the street and knew the odds against him were even greater than he had imagined. Parked at one end was a green van — at the other, a beat-up blue sedan.

Gentry's house sat innocently about a hundred feet from the pavement. Nearly halfway to the white-columned home, a tall figure in black cut through a patch of rose bushes as if the thorns had been removed. Obviously Haggard's operation was no longer covert.

To Shayne's right an Australian pine gently moved, and a Detec-

tive's Special appeared to track the moving figure.

The big redhead reacted immediately. The .38 seemed to appear. Holding the pistol with both hands, he snapped off a round.

The dark-suited detective tumbled from his cover. There were some things Shayne knew that even a yellow card couldn't protect a man from. It was a sucker play and he'd bought it — almost. March and Lesman had brought him into the case not to help Will Gentry, but to save their bacon. They hoped he would get Haggard before the rogue cop figured they were dirty and came after them. When Lesman bought it at the warehouse, March knew it was kill or be killed.

Haggard spun around, his AR-15 pointed at Shayne's gut. "He was my meat," roared the veteran. "I've been letting him trail me since the warehouse. If you're gonna be a killer, Red, you've got to learn that the best moment to zap the enemy is the split-second before they off you."

"Miami's not a battlefield, Haggard," shouted Shayne.

"Tell that to the pimps, the dealers, the hitmen. Wake up! The enemy's already laid seige to America. And the worst thing is we're helping them."

"Will Gentry let L'Argot off because that's the law."

"That's a bunch of crap. I had the SWAT team ready at L'Argot's pleasure palace. If Gentry had let me wipe out all the bastards like we did in Nam, none of the scum would have been able to get back on the street."

"Even Jade?"

"Jade's different."

"She's a whore, Haggard."

"Shut up. Just shut up." The soldier's arm twitched on the assault rifle. "I had to get her away from that dung heap. Then things would be O.K."

"You've killed in New York, Cleveland, and Miami. How many dung heaps will you have to clean up before you get rid of that smell?"

"At least one more," Haggard said, starting toward the house. "When you've got a cancer, you gotta search it out and destory it."

"My god, Mike," shouted Rourke, "he's gonna just ring the doorbell like the Avon lady and kill Gentry in cold blood."

The black figure kept walking through the Bermuda grass.

"You can't do it, Haggard," the redhead shouted.

"Yeah, I can," said the still-walking soldier. "If I hadn't zapped Lesman at the warehouse, you'd be another number in today's body count."

"Gentry's a good man," called Shayne.

Haggard was a few feet from the front porch. The man had the smell all over him, and Shayne knew he couldn't reach the veteran in time. He was past reaching.

"Haggard!"

The black figure grabbed Gentry's doorknob.

Slowly Shayne raised the Smith & Wesson and squeezed.



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A sharp blow caught me on the back of my head. As I sagged, I caught a glimpse of a nude girl with long blonde hair. A woodland nymph, I thought, tapping me with her magic wand. Magic wand, hell! It was a metal pipe!

Practice Makes Murder

by PATRICK SCAFFETTI

ANDY LISTER'S HANDSOME, NORMALLY PLACID FACE REFLECTED bitter rage as he glared at the huge poster on the brick wall across the street. His slate-gray eyes were slits of venomous loathing, and the muscles of his tightly-clenched jaws twitched with barely restrained fury.

Faye, her Buddha-like bulk settled on a folding chair behind the cash register, stared at the painter with startled curiosity. Obviously, she was as taken aback as I by the Jekyll and Hyde transformation that had just occurred before us in her tiny novelty shop.

"Just look at that savage animal!" Andy growled, wagging a paint-stained finger toward the poster.

I glanced through the streaked display window at the enlarged photograph of the muscular boxer wearing scarlet trunks. He was posed in an aggressive stance with his gloves held up in front of him, and he glowered malevolently at the narrow street. His dark hair was

worn short, making his already round head appear even more bulbous, and one puffy ear stood out a good two inches farther than the other. His nose had been broken more than once, and it hung like a scoop of lumpy mashed potatoes above his thin-lipped mouth. Beneath the picture, large block letters read: RODNEY BEDFORD, HEAVY-WEIGHT CHALLENGER, WILL BE APPEARING AT RANDAZZO'S SPORTING GOODS SHOP ON FRIDAY, OCTOBER 1, FROM NOON UNTIL 2 P.M.

"Leo, have you ever seen a crueler-looking barbarian in your life?" Andy demanded without taking his eyes from the poster. "And he'll be right here in town in two days."

As far as I was concerned, at that moment Andy looked every bit as barbaric as the boxer, but I kept the thought to myself. I'd known Andy since he'd first opened his art studio a few blocks away from Faye's inner-city shop, and he frequently stopped by for a soft drink and conversation. But I'd never before seen him so upset and angry. Andy was a short, slim man in his early thirties with shoulder-length brown hair and a bushy brown moustache. Though generally congenial and composed, his behavior this afternoon revealed a whole new aspect of his personality.

"It's so unfair," Andy muttered, leaning back against the archaic soft drink cooler. "So goddamned unfair. I've dedicated my life to art and beauty, and, yet, I've got to struggle to make ends meet. But that animal is making a fortune by pounding people into pulp. It's enough to make a non-violent, civilized man consider murder."

Faye drew deeply on her ever-present cigarette, then said, "That might be a little extreme, Andy."

"Not in the case of Bedford, it isn't," Andy snapped. "You're a writer, Leo, an artist. You've had as much trouble getting recognized as I have. Doesn't it upset you that a brute like Bedford has become rich and famous because he can hurt and destroy?"

I cleared my throat uneasily, both flattered and discomforted by Andy's reference to me as an artist. I'd moved to the city at the age of twenty-one to seek out inspiration and write a novel. Now, fifteen years later, I had a title for my work — *Michelangelo's Dropcloth* — but I'd yet to attack chapter one. Though I knew it wasn't wise to rush into things, I had recently begun to suspect that I might be stalling.

"Well, I'm not a boxing fan myself," I confessed at last. "But I've got to admit it's a sport that does demand skill."

"Mean, destructive skill," Andy spat out.

"I can't argue with that point," I conceded. "Bedford has a fight scheduled against the heavyweight champ in three or four weeks,

hasn't he?"

"Yeah, a couple weeks after he appears at the sporting goods shop," Andy barked. "I'm sure he's only going to be at Randazzo's for the publicity. Hell, I doubt if he can even write his name to give autographs." Then, with an obvious effort, he relaxed his tight facial muscles and smiled wryly. "I shouldn't let myself get so upset over such nonsense. It isn't worth it."

"Save your emotions for your painting, Andy," Faye advised in her gravelly voice. "Don't waste energy on things you don't have any control over."

Andy nodded and took a long swallow from his bottle of Coke. "That's good advice," he said. "But it's not always easy to follow. What makes it especially hard is that my studio is right above the building adjoining Randazzo's shop. That poster of Bedford is plastered up and down the whole street. No matter where I look, I see his vicious face peering out at me. And I detest the man and everything he stands for."

"You almost sound as if you know Bedford personally," I said. "Have you ever met him?"

Andy shook his head. "No, fortunately I've never seen him face to face," he grumbled. "But I've spoken with others who do know him. He was raised only about half a mile from here. As a kid, I hear he was nothing but trouble, and he had several scrapes with the law when he was still a juvenile. In fact, when he was eighteen or nineteen, he ended up in prison. Not long after he was released, he turned professional."

As he spoke, Andy's voice once again began to grate with anger. "And now, after years of thumbing his nose at the law, he's the public's sweetheart. He's idolized because he can break ribs and smash faces. I strive to create beauty, only to receive rejection. Society makes me sick!"

"You're right in a lot of ways," I said. "But there's not a damned thing that can be done about it."

"Yeah, I guess that's true," Andy said. "So what's the sense in getting my blood pressure up over it?" He glanced rather sheepishly at Faye, then me. "I walked over here this afternoon for a pleasant break from my painting and end up ranting and raving like a lunatic. Forgive me."

"Don't apologize, Andy," Faye said, grinding her cigarette butt into an overflowing ashtray. "Your feelings are understandable."

ALL THREE OF US LAPSED INTO SILENCE, BUT ANDY'S TIRADE

had left a residue of anger and discontent in Faye's novelty shop. I glanced restlessly around the small, cramped interior. My gaze shifted from the cellophane-wrapped gag items that covered one wall to the wooden counter supporting the old-fashioned cash register and stacks of gum, candy bars, and cigarettes.

I looked at Faye. Her pale blue eyes met mine, and I tried to smile. Her plump, homely face was surrounded by billowing tangles of gray-black hair. I suspected that she was well into her fifties, but she'd never told me her exact age. Even though I had visited her shop on an almost daily basis for the last umpteen years, I knew very little about her background before opening the shop. She clearly enjoyed being somewhat of an enigma. But, despite her eccentricities, she was one of the kindest and most perceptive people I'd ever known.

Abruptly, Andy's face brightened. "I'm not giving up on fame and fortune yet," he announced. "I almost forgot to tell you about my new model."

Faye and I both studied him curiously. I was pleased to see that his belligerent, gloomy mood had apparently lifted.

"Her name is Gloria," Andy continued enthusiastically. "That's about all she'll tell me about herself. She came up to my studio almost three weeks ago and asked me to use her as a model. She seemed desperate for a job, and she'd heard that I used women to pose for life studies. At the time, I really didn't need a model, but Gloria was so unusual that I simply couldn't turn her down. I knew the moment I saw her that I could do marvelous things with her on canvas."

"She must be a real knockout," I commented.

Andy grimaced at my choice of words, then said, "No, Leo, I wouldn't call her a knockout. To tell the truth, I'm not sure I'd even say her face was all that pretty, even though she does have a gorgeous body and fantastic long, blonde hair. But there's a quality to her that I can't quite put my finger on. She radiates determination and strength, and she wasn't the least bit hesitant to pose in the nude. I've already done a couple of paintings of her that I believe are among the finest things I've ever done. Gloria has captured my imagination like no other woman, I've ever met."

"Does she live around here?" Faye inquired.

"I honestly don't know," Andy replied. "She's very secretive about herself. I got the impression that perhaps she doesn't want her husband or boyfriend to find out what she's up to. She insists that I pay her in cash. I can't afford to give her much, but I've got a hunch she'd model for free."

"She certainly sounds mysterious and beguiling," I said.

"Gloria is both of those and more," Andy said. "If you're interested, why don't the two of you stop by my studio one of these days and see my paintings of her? If you're lucky, Gloria may even be there herself."

"I'd love to see the paintings," I said. But I doubted that Faye would venture out of her shop to view all the treasures of the Louvre. She rarely left her limited confines for even brief periods of time, depending instead on friends like myself to run errands for her.

"Well, I'd better head back to the studio," Andy said. He guzzled the remainder of his Coke and stepped over to the door.

"You know, Faye, I'd like to do a portrait of you sometime," he said. "Your face has character."

Faye laughed. "One day, I just might take you up on that, Andy."

"So long, Faye, Leo," Andy said. "I'll see you again in a day or two. And don't forget my offer to come to the studio. I'm eager to hear your reactions to my paintings of Gloria."

"I'll do that, Andy," I said.

ANDY WALKED OUT INTO THE SUNNY SEPTEMBER AFTERNOON. He paused on the sidewalk to stare over at the poster of Rodney Bedford. Then he shook his head in disgust and proceeded down the street.

"There is something wrong with a society that makes stars of fighters while letting its artists scrape by as best they can," I commented self-righteously. "We creative people don't have an easy time of it."

"There are plenty of starving boxers, Leo," Faye reminded me. "The best in every field usually make it to the top. And whether they're good or bad morally doesn't seem to matter. All that counts is the quality of what they do."

I wondered if Faye were referring to my own lack of literary output but immediately decided not to pursue it. The topic made me uneasy.

Kitty, the large cat sprawled across Faye's ample lap, slowly rose on her haunches and leapt onto the display counter. Kitty had once been pure white, but, despite the hours she put in diligently grooming herself, the grit and pollution of the city had permanently turned her a sooty gray. She was the latest of a series of strays that always seemed to find their way to Faye's shop. I sometimes suspected that there was a communication network set up among the city's cat population whereby they let each other know that here at the novelty shop they'd find an easy mark. But, after a week or two of Faye's luxurious treatment, the cats would suddenly leave, eager to resume their gamier

existence amidst the streets and alleys. Another stray would always appear within a few days though to rest contentedly on Faye's wide lap and to assume the name Kitty.

Now, Kitty stretched each of her grimy legs in turn, then yawned as if she were intent on turning her head inside out. Her exercise completed, she hopped back onto Faye's lap, curled up, and resumed her nap. She slept approximately twenty-two and a half hours out of each day. I sometimes wondered if her dreams were filled with excitement and romance.

"Look at that, Leo," Faye said. "Across the street. What a pathetic sight."

I peered out the window and saw another of the city's bedraggled strays. This one was human.

An old woman wearing a shabby and filthy green dress was stooping in the gutter, rummaging through a small pile of debris. She appeared to be in her mid-sixties, and her gray hair was matted and disheveled. Over her left shoulder, she carried a brown shopping bag which more than likely contained all of her worldly possessions.

Faye and I watched the bag lady for a moment without speaking. Then Faye muttered, "Where do people like her sleep? How do they live?"

"They cope one way or another," I replied. "I've seen them sleeping in doorways and on benches. Some of them sleep wherever they happen to passout from too much wine."

"Tragic," Faye said. "They can't all be alcoholics."

"A lot of them are. They eat whatever they can find in the trash and use the little money they can scrounge up for booze. Some are just rejects from society, I guess. They're stuck here until they die."

The bag lady rose unsteadily, closely examining something she had discovered in the gutter. As she reached over to drop the item into her bag, a loud crack shattered the silence. Faye and I exchanged a puzzled glance, and Kitty raised her head with an annoyed jerk.

"That sounded like a gun shot," I said. Two more cracks followed in quick succession.

I looked back toward the bag lady and jumped to my feet. She had crumpled to her knees, blood splattered onto her face and hands. Then she sagged forward and lay still.

Faye shoved Kitty from her lap and heaved herself erect. She grabbed the wall phone and dialed three digits. A moment later, she gasped out what we had just witnessed, told the location, and then hung up.

Across the street, a couple of patrons from Gilbert's Bar passed the

prostrate bag lady, eyeing her with disinterest. They undoubtedly assumed that she had collapsed in an alcoholic stupor.

I hurried from the novelty shop and ran over to the woman. At the back of my mind, I half expected another shot to rip into me, but I tried not to think about this possibility. I rolled the woman over and grimaced at the sight of her face. Smears of blood mingled with the grime coating her skin, and her eyes were half-open with only the bloodshot whites visible. A trickle of fresh crimson ran from the corner of her mouth.

As I stared down at her, wondering what to do next, an ambulance turned onto the sidestreet, wailing its way toward us. It screeched to a halt a few feet away, and two attendants burst out. They quickly checked the bag lady's carotid pulse, glanced at the pool of blood spreading around her, and shook their heads.

As a blue and white squad car pulled up behind the ambulance, I noticed that the poster of Rodney Bedford had been splattered with the old woman's blood.

FIVE HOURS LATER, I WAS BACK ON MY FAMILIAR STOOL IN Faye's novelty shop, smoking my pipe and watching Kitty sleep. Earlier, I'd given my statement to the homicide detectives and managed to complete a few odd jobs at the apartment building at the end of the block. I lived in a room on the second floor, and playing handyman paid the rent. Now, though, still shaken from the murder of the bag lady, I was finally beginning to unwind.

"Care for some coffee, Leo?" Faye asked.

"No, thanks. My nerves don't need any more stimulation," I said. "You know, Faye, I was talking with the detectives this afternoon. One of them told me that the murder across the street was the fifth shooting of a bag lady or a bum in the past three weeks. None of the killings received much publicity, but it looks as if there's a mass murderer on the loose. One who specializes in down-and-outers. So far, three bag ladies and two bums have been shot."

Faye's wrinkled face reflected surprise and disgust. "Have there been any similarities to the murders other than the victims being derelicts?"

"All of them were killed with .38 calibre bullets fired from basically the same angle," I replied. "The sniper has always been aiming down from the roof of a second story building. This afternoon, the cops figure he was on top of the shoe repair shop next door. Apparently, he just used the fire escape in the back alley to get up and down unseen."

"Why would anyone want to kill such pathetic people?" Faye asked.

"They hurt no one but themselves."

I shrugged. "Maybe the killer is a fanatic who believes they should be put out of their misery. Who can guess what motivates a killer like that? He's probably a psychotic who isn't even sure himself why he does it."

"That's a good possibility, Leo, but not the only one," Faye said thoughtfully.

"Where is that deductive mind of yours leading you now?"

"Nowhere special," she muttered. "I'm just trying to figure out other possible reasons for the murders."

"And?"

"And I'm beginning to wonder if these killings aren't practice."

"Practice!" I repeated.

Faye nodded. "Five murders of people who bother no one and who aren't going to be of great interest to the police," she said. "The authorities won't knock themselves out to find the killer of bums and bag ladies. And you've just told me that all of the shootings have occurred from the same angle."

"Maybe you've got something there, Faye," I conceded. "But you've got to admit it sounds crazy."

"No crazier than a psychotic mass murderer."

"That's true. But practice for what? Who's going to be the final victim?"

"Who knows, Leo?" Faye murmured. "Who knows?"

OUTSIDE, THE STREET WAS BATHED IN THE DWINDLING light of dusk. Rodney Bedford continued to glower over at us, and I shivered at the recollection of the blood stains on the poster. In my mind's eye, I saw the old bag woman's grotesque face once again. I felt thankful when the sound of footsteps moving along the street interrupted my morbid thoughts and erased the hideous deathmask from my imagination.

I stared through the display window, hoping to distract myself by watching the passersby. A moment later, a man and a woman in their mid-thirties appeared across the street. Both were tall and slender with dull brown hair. The woman wore a shapeless beige dress. She walked with a rigid, pokerstraight posture, while the man drooped forward, arms dangling at his sides, and shuffled listlessly. There was a vacant expression on his gaunt face. I'd seen them around the city a few times before, but I knew nothing about them.

The man glanced over toward Faye's shop and came to an abrupt stop in front of the poster of Rodney Bedford. He pointed at the door, a

childlike glee on his face.

The woman spoke to him, then led him across the street to the shop. She pushed open the door and allowed him to enter before following him inside.

"Hello," Faye smiled.

"Hello," the woman replied coolly. She would have been quite attractive if her expression hadn't been so grim. But her lips were tightly pursed, and there was a distant, preoccupied look to her blue eyes. She wore no make-up at all, and her short brown hair was lusterless and combed back in a mannish style.

"My brother would like a soft drink," she said, guiding him toward the cooler. "The pop is in here, Jeff. Would you like orange?"

"Yes," he answered in a hollow voice. "Orange is good." He was obviously brain-damaged or retarded.

As the woman pulled a bottle from the cooler, Faye said, "I've noticed the two of you walking down the street before. I'm glad you finally decided to stop by. I'm Faye, and this is Leo Reynolds."

"I'm Jennie Clayton, and my brother's name is Jeff," she said.

"Are you new to the area?" I inquired.

"Yes, we are," Jennie replied. "We've got an apartment a few blocks over." She opened the bottle of pop and handed it to her brother. He began to guzzle it at once. "Slow down, Jeff. There's no hurry." She spoke to him as if addressing a child.

"Have you always lived in the city?" I asked.

"No," Jennie replied in disgust. "We used to live in a suburb. But the money ran out, and we were forced to move here. Is that what you wanted to hear?"

"I — I'm sorry," I stuttered. "I didn't mean to be rude."

Jennie sighed wearily. "I'm the one who should be sorry," she said. "I had no right to snap at you like that. It's just that things have been kind of tough lately. Jeff needs a lot of attention, and sometimes it wears me down."

"No need to explain," I said.

Kitty stepped daintily onto the counter and sniffed at the air.

"Cat!" Jeff exclaimed.

"That's right, Jeff," Jennie said. "Pretty cat." She reached out and stroked Kitty's back. Immediately, the cat collapsed onto her side, purring loudly.

Jeff began to pet Kitty, too.

"Gently, Jeff, gently," Jennie instructed. "Now finish your pop, and we'll be on our way."

Obediently, Jeff drained the bottle and handed it to his sister. Jennie

placed it on the counter, paid Faye, and said, "Good-bye. Come along, Jeff. It's time to go home."

"Good-bye," Faye said. "Don't be strangers any more."

"Thanks," Jennie called over her shoulder, then took her brother's arm and steered him down the street.

"There's a woman who doesn't have an easy time of it," I said.

Faye shook her head, sympathy and concern on her face. "That's for sure," she agreed softly, lighting a cigarette. She drew a deep breath of smoke as if seeking sustenance from the tobacco.

Before we could discuss Jennie and Jeff Clayton any further, the door opened again. This time Officer Ted Meyers entered.

"Howdy, Faye, Leo," Ted said. "I hear there was some excitement around here today."

"That wasn't my idea of excitement," I said. "How are you, Ted?"

"Not bad," he replied, then walked over to the cooler and pulled out a Coke. The young, black policeman with his short Afro and compassionate brown eyes was a frequent visitor to Faye's shop and a good friend as well. He was one of the most dedicated cops I'd ever met.

"That bag lady who was shot across the street makes the fifth derelict killed in only a few weeks," Ted commented sadly.

"That's what Leo was telling me," Faye said. "Any leads or suspects yet?"

"Not a thing as far as I know," he replied. "There are a few theories going around, but nothing concrete."

"Have you considered the possibility that the killer may be practicing on these bums and bag ladies?" Faye asked.

"That's a new one to me," Ted said skeptically. "But I suppose it's no more farfetched than some of the other ideas I've heard." Ted drank from his Coke, then glanced over at the poster of Rodney Bedford. "There'll be even more excitement around town when that guy gets here," he muttered.

"You a fan, Ted?" I asked.

He shook his head. "Hell, no. Bedford has got a record twice as long as your arm. As far as I'm concerned, they should have kept that man in jail for the rest of his life."

"That seems to be the consensus among a lot of people," I said.

"I'm taking my seven-year-old son over to the sporting goods shop to see him on Friday, but I'm doing it under protest," Ted said. "Billy has seen him on TV a few times, and he's never had a chance to meet a real sports hero before. I just hope that Billy doesn't find out the truth about that creep."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I've heard quite a few stories about Bedford," Ted said. "A lot of the older cops remember him from when he was a kid, and they can't believe all the attention he's getting now."

TED PAUSED FOR A FEW MOMENTS TO SIP HIS DRINK, THEN continued. "About seven or eight years ago, Bedford was living with a woman named Shelley Dover. They had an apartment over at the Harper House. He stayed with her long enough to give her a couple of kids. Then, when he started making a name for himself in boxing, he just split. He claimed the kids weren't his and threatened Shelley with God knows what if she protested. He even went so far as to get some of his scummy friends to swear they'd had relations with her. He ruined any chance the woman would ever have for a decent life."

"The guy's a real prince," I muttered.

"Listen to this one," Ted said. "Quite a few years back, Bedford was in one of those Golden Gloves matches, and he lost fair and square. But he couldn't accept defeat. He got a few of his friends, and they waited until the other boxer left the gym later that night. They jumped him in an alley and beat the guy to a pulp — broke both of his arms and one leg and gave him a fractured skull. Shelley lied and claimed that she'd been with him the whole evening. She got Bedford off the hook. The other fighter had a promising career until then, but he's never stepped into a ring since then."

"This Bedford is sounding worse by the minute," Faye grumbled. "No wonder no one has a good word to say about him."

"There aren't many good things you can say about the guy," Ted agreed. "I wish to heaven my kid didn't think he was such a hero."

"Who was the Golden Gloves boxer that Bedford beat up?" I asked.

"Fellow by the name of Howard McConnell," Ted answered. "He was working as a parking lot attendant by the Madison Theater last I heard. No, there's no two ways about it — Bedford is a monster. Maybe we're all lucky that he made a success out of boxing. Otherwise, he would have been an even worse menace to society. It makes me sick to think he has a good shot at becoming the next heavyweight champion of the world though. He makes Jake LaMotta seem like an altar boy."

Ted finished his Coke and said, "One last Bedford story, and then I'd better be on my way."

Faye and I looked at him with a combination of revulsion and interest.

"Shortly after he started living with Shelley Dover, Bedford robbed a gas station a few miles from here, over on the corner of Franklin and

Dexter Boulevard," Ted explained. "The owner caught him red-handed, and Bedford proceeded to beat the hell out of him. Some witnesses saw what was going on, and there was even a positive identification of Bedford. But, somehow or another, he managed to get off on a technicality. Luckily, a few years later, he got picked up for something he couldn't weasel his way out of, and ended up in the slammer. But he didn't stay there long enough."

Ted shook his head in bewilderment. "There's no accounting for what goes on in life, I suppose. But it sure seems wrong that Bedford is now on easy street after messing up so many lives. I'm thankful he's just going to be in town for a few hours. Right after his appearance at Randazzo's, I heard he's flying down to Florida."

"He won't be missed," I said.

Ted left a moment later, leaving Faye and me to ponder his tales of Rodney Bedford in silence. We often sat together quietly, each of us wrapped up in our own thoughts. At other times, we would discuss a topic for hours on end, especially if we were attempting to unravel the solution to a crime. We'd even solved a few cases that had stumped the police. Faye's forte was deduction; mine was legwork. Once in a while, this combination formed a team worthy of Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin. On other occasions, we were closer to Laurel and Hardy.

Now, my thoughts drifted between the vicious boxer and the seemingly senseless murders of the city's bums and bag ladies. Both seemed to represent violence to an absurd extreme. But Bedford had found a socially acceptable channel for his cruel tendencies. The killer of the derelicts had not.

We sat for quite a while that evening, exchanging few words. Faye stroked Kitty and chain smoked cigarettes. I drew on my pipe.

Finally, I climbed off my stool. "I'm heading for home now, Faye," I said. "See you tomorrow."

"All right, Leo. Take it easy."

That night in my apartment, I finally slipped into a troubled sleep with the image of the dead bag lady's face floating before me.

I WAS AWAKENED AT SIX O'CLOCK THE FOLLOWING MORNING by a sharp rapping on my door. Groggily, I wriggled out of bed, pulled on my ancient flannel robe, and opened the door. Sarah Rockwell, a tenant from the fourth floor, glared at me. Her scant gray hair was wound tightly around pink plastic rollers, exposing more than a little of her glistening scalp. Cold cream filled the myriad cracks and crevices in her face. With her long, angular face and blazing eyes, she reminded me of a demented alligator on the rampage.

"G'morning, Mrs. Rockwell," I yawned. "What's the problem?"

"The same problem I told you about four days ago, Leo," she barked. "That leaky bathroom faucet and rattling pipe have kept me awake long enough. I figured if I couldn't sleep, I'd get you up too. See how you like it."

"I'll get to it today, Mrs. Rockwell," I promised.

"You'll get to it right now, Leo Reynolds," she declared.

"Okay," I said. "I'll be up to your room in fifteen or twenty minutes. First, I've got to get my tool box from the basement."

"If you're not there in fifteen minutes, I'll be back." With that, she wheeled and stomped toward the stairway, clutching her red chenille robe closely about her.

I sighed and closed the door. I hoped the rest of the day improved.

MRS. ROCKWELL'S FAUCET TOOK ME CLOSE TO FOUR HOURS to repair to her satisfaction. When I finally left her apartment, my hands and arms were filthy, but at least, the old widow was placated until the next emergency sent her storming down to pound on my door.

I showered, changed clothes, and then left the apartment building. Outside, the September air was clear and cool. After such a long time contorted under Mrs. Rockwell's bathroom sink, I felt like walking for a while to work out the kinks. Now would be the ideal time to stroll over to Andy's studio and see his paintings of Gloria.

I followed a maze of city streets past scores of boarded up businesses, thriving bars and adult movie houses, and an occasional shop that had somehow managed to survive the decline of the area. Along the way, I spied several posters advertising Rodney Bedford's visit to the sporting goods shop, but I wasn't prepared for what awaited me on the sidestreet where both Andy's studio and Randazzo's shop were situated. Up and down the street, Bedford's picture was plastered on nearly every available site. No matter where I looked, I found myself staring into his cruel eyes or facing his boxing gloves. I was beginning to understand why Andy had reacted so strongly to the poster across the street from Faye's shop.

I hurried down the block, keeping my gaze riveted on the sidewalk until I reached the stairway leading up to the studio. Andy had the second floor above a drug store. Quickly, I ascended the steps, and, as I yanked open the door on the landing, I called out, "Hello, Andy. It's me, Leo."

The spacious studio was bathed in bright sunlight which streamed through a huge rectangular skylight. I caught a brief glimpse of Andy's bearded face before noticing the naked woman standing on a raised

platform in front of him. Her hands were clasped behind her head, ruffling the golden blonde hair that streamed over her shoulders, and her high, firm breasts were thrust forward enticingly. As I stared at her in open-mouthed surprise, she dropped her hands to cover her breasts and scurried behind a large screen.

The sound of Andy's laughter brought me back to reality. "I think you've startled Gloria half to death," he chuckled.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I shouldn't have barged in like that."

"Don't worry about it, Leo," Andy said. "Gloria may be a little shy in the flesh, but my painting of her won't turn and hide. Come here and take a look at this one."

I stepped over to Andy's side and examined the painting I'd interrupted. It appeared to be nearly completed, but I couldn't tell for certain. The canvas was covered with a mass of garish colors, and, by squinting, I was able to detect what I believed might be a naked woman standing in a pose similar to the one Gloria had recently assumed.

I peered at the painting long and hard, wondering what the hell I could possibly say about it. Only vaguely did it even resemble a human shape, and certainly it was not identifiable as the lush blonde I'd just seen.

I nodded, trying to appear contemplative, and said, "Um hmmm."

"What's you gut level reaction, Leo?" Andy demanded. "I've caught the essence of Gloria, haven't I?"

"I believe you have, Andy," I replied. "Yes, I see the essence of her right there on the canvas."

Andy beamed. "Some people don't like abstract art, but they're the ignoramuses of the world. I knew you'd appreciate my work, Leo. You're sensitive and intuitive. You need those qualities to appreciate fine art."

Suddenly, listening to Andy, the painting seemed to take on a new depth of meaning for me. "Very good indeed," I murmured.

"A lot of the credit goes to Gloria herself," Andy said in a voice loud enough for her to hear on the other side of the room. "I've never before had such a terrific model." Then, in a normal tone, he added, "I've got some completed works over here, Leo."

I followed Andy over to where several canvases were propped against the wall. They were all done in the same style as his work-in-progress, and none of them reminded me of a naked woman. I paused in front of one painting. Bright yellow for the hair, various shades of beige for the body, dark slashes for the features. But the entire canvas was dominated by candy apple red nipples the size of softballs atop gigantic, light brown breasts.

"You've captured her essence all right," I said. But secretly I knew that I wouldn't have used one of those paintings to line the litter box that Faye kept in the alley for her more fastidious strays.

Reluctantly, I observed, "I've seen some of your other work, Andy, and it always looked like what it was supposed to be. Why the sudden change?"

"Those paintings were trite," he explained patiently. "Hollow and devoid of feeling. I'm seeking emotion now. I'm not interested in the merely physical, I'm after the nectar, the essence, the spirit."

"Oh," I said lamely. "Well, I'm sure glad I had a chance to see your paintings, Andy. But I've got to be on my way. Sorry to have interrupted you."

"Come back any time, Leo," Andy said, clapping me on the shoulder. "Next time, if Gloria is dressed, I'll introduce you."

"I'm looking forward to that," I smiled. "Take care, Andy." I turned toward the screen behind which Gloria hid. "Good-bye, Gloria."

A muffled sound bid me farewell.

"I'll probably see you at Faye's shop tomorrow," Andy said as I opened the door. "I don't want to be around when that goddamned Rodney Bedford makes his appearance next door. You'll be able to hear the hoopla right through the walls."

"I don't blame you," I said, then descended the stairs to the street.

OUT OF CURIOSITY, I WALKED THE FEW STEPS TO RANDAZZO's sporting goods shop. An enormous sign in the display window proclaimed: RODNEY BEDFORD HERE IN PERSON ON FRIDAY, OCTOBER 1. All around the sign were photos of the boxer in various poses, but I peered between them into the shop. The usual array of sports equipment filled the place, and an elevated podium had been set up toward the back. It would be from this vantage point that Bedford would undoubtedly address his fans and sign their autograph books.

Randazzo's was a full two stories high, and I looked at the section of the upper wall which adjoined Andy's studio. Only a narrow width of plaster would separate the artist from the boxer he detested. I could see why Andy had responded so vehemently. He must have felt as if Bedford's appearance was a personal affront to him.

I glanced from the section of wall that bordered the art studio to the podium, then back to the wall. A startling thought slowly took form in my mind. All of the bums and bag ladies had been shot from above when they had been several feet past the sniper. If someone were able

to shoot through the wall from Andy's studio, the podium would be in exactly the same position.

Could Andy have murdered the derelicts simply to practice shooting from that angle? Was his ultimate victim to be Rodney Bedford? After all, being so close to the sporting goods shop would have to intensify Andy's hatred for the boxer.

"No," I muttered aloud. "Impossible." Andy obviously resented the fighter a great deal, but he was not a killer. He was not the type to murder another human being in cold blood. And the very idea of shooting through a wall was preposterous, the stuff that pulp fiction is made of.

But, as I stood before the sporting goods shop, another suspicion took hold. Though Andy was certainly not the killer, it was quite possible that Rodney Bedford was to be the sniper's *coup de grace*, his final target. Only the day before, Ted Meyers had mentioned three people with very good motives for wanting the boxer dead.

You're letting your imagination get the best of you, Leo, I reminded myself firmly. The sniper was probably a madman, acting out a horrible compulsion to kill. Faye's theory of the earlier murders being practice was interesting, but it was only a theory. And probably one hundred percent inaccurate.

The door to Randazzo's swung open, and a short, heavyset man emerged. He grinned at me. "Another fan eager to see the future champ, eh?" he asked.

I shrugged. "Do you work here?"

"Sure do," he said cheerfully, the smile still pasted on his face. "In fact, I'm Sam Randazzo, the owner."

"Nice to meet you, Mr. Randazzo." A sudden question occurred to me. "Say, I was just wondering when you first began advertising that Bedford would be appearing here."

The man looked contemplative for a moment, then said, "Three weeks ago today. September 9th. I remember because the posters were a couple of days late, and I was beginning to worry if they'd ever arrive. No need for that though. This place is going to be jammed come tomorrow. See you then, buddy. You'd better get here early if you want to get close to Bedford." Mr. Randazzo hustled off down the street.

As I started walking toward Faye's shop, I wondered if it were only coincidence that the first murder had occurred so soon after it was announced that Bedford would be in town.

Somehow, I doubted that very much.

A FEW MINUTES LATER, I WAS SITTING ON MY STOOL IN

Faye's shop, sipping coffee, and telling her my suspicions. She listened intently, though she appeared to be staring dreamily at the billows of cigarette smoke issuing from her mouth.

When I finished, she looked directly into my face. "It sounds a little unlikely, Leo, but there's some sense there, too. There are plenty of people who would like to see Bedford dead, and it is strange that the first murder took place right after Bedford's planned visit was made public."

"So what do we do now?" I asked. "Go to the police with this crazy idea? I could tell that even Ted figured it was totally asinine."

Faye shook her grizzled head. "The police would laugh you right out of the station, Leo." She smoked in thoughtful silence for a few moments, then said, "You're going to have to go see those people that Ted mentioned yesterday, the ones who have reason to hate Bedford. Maybe you can find out something by talking with them. It's a long shot, but I don't see what else we can do."

"We," I repeated. "Sounds to me as if I'm doing all the work."

"So you are, Leo, so you are," Faye said affectionately. "But I'll provide the guidance. Ted said that Howard McConnell works in the parking lot by the Madison Theater and that Shelley Dover lives at the Harper Apartment House. Try those places first, and let's hope they haven't moved."

Howard McConnell slipped out of the Cadillac he had just parked and looked at me curiously. He was quite tall and heavy in a way that reminded me of a muscular man gone to flab. "What can I do for you?" he asked.

"You *are* Howard McConnell, aren't you?" I inquired.

He nodded.

"I'd like to ask you a few questions about Rodney Bedford," I said.

His expression hardened. "You a cop or a newspaperman or something?" he demanded.

"No. I just want to find out a little about Bedford," I said nervously. "Completely off the record."

"Why ask me?" he wanted to know.

"I heard that you're one of the few fighters who ever beat Bedford," I said.

McConnell laughed bitterly. "I beat that bastard all right," he said. "Not many people remember that though. Because after I beat him in an honest match, he and a bunch of his buddies got together and nearly killed me. Busted me up so bad I could never fight again."

"How did he ever get away with that?" I asked. "Why didn't the police nab him?"

"They questioned him about it," McConnell sneered. "They knew he did it as well as I did, but his girlfriend swore that they were together after the fight. She claimed he was never out of her sight, that lying bitch. I didn't have any real evidence the cops told me. Except for the fact that I damn well saw Bedford. But that wasn't enough. I guess they wanted photographs."

McConnell's face was twisted with emotion, and I was afraid that he was about to cry. "I was in the hospital for almost three months after Bedford and his friends got done with me," he said in a choked voice. "When I finally got out, the doctors told me no more boxing. My body couldn't take the strain after what I'd been through. So that's why I'm stuck here, parking these lousy cars. And I'll probably die here too. I owe it all to Rodney Bedford. If he were to come into this lot, I'd hop in the closest car and run him down. Then I'd back up and run over him again." He drew in a ragged breath, then added, "But that isn't likely, is it? Nowadays, Rodney has a chauffeur park his car for him."

"Thank you for your time, Mr. McConnell," I said. My words sounded weak and flimsy, but the man just nodded. He slumped back against a gray Continental, and I turned and walked away.

As I headed toward the apartment building where Shelley Dover lived, I went over what Howard McConnell had told me in my mind. I was fairly convinced that he had spoken the truth, and I doubted that he was the sniper. His emotions had shown through like a bloody wound, and he'd made no attempt to disguise the loathing he felt for Bedford. If he had intended to murder the boxer, he would have been more evasive and less open with his feelings. At least, I thought so.

SHELLEY DOVER'S APARTMENT WAS ON THE FIFTH FLOOR OF a dilapidated red brick building. The hallway smelled of cabbage, sour milk, and worse.

When I knocked, a boy of about eight opened the door. He was tall for his age and emaciated, and he bore a striking resemblance to Rodney Bedford. He stared at me hostilely, then demanded, "What do you want?"

"Is your mother at home?"

"I don't know," he snapped. "I'll go see." He slammed the door in my face.

Almost a full minute later, the door opened again, this time revealing a stoop-shouldered woman who was as thin and gaunt as the boy. Her blonde hair was long and badly in need of a shampoo. There were dark circles beneath her tired-looking eyes. Though she was not yet thirty, she reminded me of a woman in her seventies.

"Yeah?" She looked at me without interest.

"My name is Leo Reynolds," I said. "I'd like to talk to you about Rodney Bedford for a minute or two, if you don't mind."

A flicker of anger flashed in her green eyes, then just as quickly disappeared. "You a friend of his?" she asked.

"No, I'm not," I answered honestly. "In fact, from what I've heard about him, I wouldn't even want to meet him."

"Then maybe I'll talk to you," she said. "But what's this about?"

"I'm investigating Rodney's past to see what made him the man he is today," I said.

"I'm not sure he is a man," she muttered. "Monster would be closer to the truth. Come on in."

I stepped into an apartment that made my own shabby walkup look like a penthouse at the Ritz. The piecemeal furniture was tattered beyond repair. Clothes and junk were strewn everywhere.

"Have a seat, if you can find one," the woman invited.

I sat down on a wobbly wooden chair, and she shoved some clothes from the lumpy couch and dropped onto it wearily. "Okay, let's talk," she said. She radiated a loneliness that made me suspect she dearly welcomed this opportunity to talk with another adult.

"I heard that you and Rodney were quite close at one time," I said in a matter-of-fact tone.

The woman tossed back her head and laughed. "Hell, yes, we were close," she said. "That boy who opened the door for you, Kevin, is Rodney's son. I got a girl, too, but she's playing at a friend's right now. Rodney's daughter. But do you think he'll admit they're his? Not Rodney. He's got more money than he can ever use now, but I haven't seen a cent of it. His own kids could starve to death for all he cares."

"How long were the two of you together?"

"I don't know. Three, four years maybe. He left before MaryAnn was even born."

"Why did you stay with him?" I inquired gently.

Shelley shrugged. "I loved him. At least, I thought I did. I lied to get him out of jams and did everything I could to make him happy. He used to beat me up and cheat on me all the time, but I figured that deep down he loved me a little bit too. I was wrong though. Rodney never loved me or anybody else. I don't think that man can love. He only knows how to hurt people."

"When did he leave?"

"He took off soon after he turned pro," Shelley said. "He'd been in jail, and I waited for him to get out. But as soon as he was free, he left me. Said he didn't need me holding him back. I tried to get him to pay

me something to help take care of the kids, but he said they weren't even his. He got some of his friends to say they'd slept with me. He threatened to kill me and the kids if I tried to get any support money from him."

I was amazed at the dull, emotionless voice with which Shelley Dover spoke about this man she had once loved. She might just as well have been talking about her shopping list — although I doubted she ever bothered to make one out.

"Do you plan on seeing Rodney at Randazzo's sporting goods shop tomorrow?" I asked.

"I hadn't heard he was going to be around," she said. "But I wouldn't bother to cross the street to see him — unless I could spit on his dead body."

BACK AT THE NOVELTY SHOP, I GAVE FAYE DETAILED summaries of my visits with McConnell and Shelley Dover. During my fifteen year stint warming up to write *Michelangelo's Dropcloth*, I hadn't produced a line of prose, but I had taught myself to remember conversations verbatim. Someday, when I finally did begin to put words on paper, I figured this talent would come in handy. Until then, it served me well in terms of reporting interviews to Faye with exactitude.

"So we've got two possible candidates," I concluded. "Howard McConnell and Shelley Dover. And I suppose we can't entirely discount Andy Lister either."

"Rodney Bedford certainly isn't lacking in enemies, is he?" Faye reflected in a troubled voice. "All three of those people you've mentioned have expressed violent feelings toward the fighter."

"They sure have," I agreed. "Still, I have a hard time believing that any one of them really is planning to murder Bedford. Not that they wouldn't like to see him dead. I just can't picture any of them shooting others in cold blood for target practice."

Faye shrugged. "One of them may be an excellent actor or actress," she said. "But, if the killer really is practicing on the derelicts, where is he going to be when he shoots Bedford? The fact that Andy's studio and Randazzo's shop share a wall that provides the same angle of attack is curious, but it isn't very plausible."

"No, it's not," I said. "But then what is plausible about this whole business?"

"Good point," Faye muttered. "But I wouldn't be a bit surprised if there was an attempt on Bedford's life. Good God, that man has left more unhappiness and grief in his wake than anyone I've ever heard of

before. And we only know a little about his background. Imagine all the other tragedies he's probably responsible for."

"There's one more place I could visit, but I don't know that it would turn up anything new," I offered.

Faye eyed me levelly. "The gas station where Bedford beat the owner?"

"Right. Ted mentioned that it was located on the corner of Franklin and Dexter Boulevard."

"Give it a try, Leo. Who knows what you might come up with."

"May as well," I said. "But I'll go tomorrow. I've got some odd jobs to finish up at the apartment house, and a few of the tenants have started complaining."

"Okay," Faye said. "But you'd better make it early tomorrow. Don't forget that Rodney Bedford is supposed to appear at noon."

"I'll be there first thing in the morning."

I pulled out my pipe and tobacco and took a moment to get it cooking. Then I said, "Chances are good that we're not even on the right track, Faye, but I'm fascinated by what I'm learning about Bedford. He's like a study in pure evil. I'll use that bastard in my book one day. It's not often you get a chance to learn about a real human monster. A sociopath."

"But he's a very successful sociopath," Faye added. "The fact that he's a miserable human being doesn't take away from his fame."

"Unless someone takes *him* away permanently," I countered. "And I can't say the world would be out much if he were killed."

"No, but those bums and bag ladies were innocent victims," Faye reminded me. "The killer shot them as if they didn't matter in the slightest."

I said nothing. There was no sense arguing with the truth.

I AWOKE AT EIGHT ON FRIDAY MORNING TO THE CLAMOR OF my alarm clock instead of Mrs. Rockwell's irate rapping. Half an hour later, I boarded a bus which stopped at Franklin and Dexter Boulevard. The ride lasted only ten minutes, and I got off in an area that had not yet experienced the fullfledged blight of the inner city. It was well on its way in that direction though.

There was only one gas station at the intersection, and I walked over to it. As I approached, a large black and brown German shepherd sauntered casually out of the attached garage. He moved toward me with a slow, cumbersome gait and met me at the doorway to the office. He sat down directly in my path.

"Excuse me, pooch," I said nervously. Small dogs didn't bother me

in the least, but watchdog types definitely made me uneasy.

The dog looked at me, detected my discomfort, and bared yellow teeth. He added a low growl for effect.

I glanced around, hoping to spot an attendant, but the only one in sight was servicing a car at the pumps. Cautiously, I took a step backward. The dog crouched. Flecks of spittle bubbled around his sharp canine teeth. Another retreating step brought an even deeper growl.

Suddenly, I felt damp with perspiration, and my heart thumped frantically. "Nice doggie," I croaked hoarsely. "Nice sonofabitch." Tone of voice, not vocabulary, calmed dogs — or so I'd heard.

"Talk like that will make Duke mad," a man's voice warned. I turned to see the attendant walking briskly toward me. "Play with him if you like, but don't call him names." The man's teeth were as yellow as the dog's.

"I wasn't playing," I said. "I thought he was going to attack."

"Naw, Duke wouldn't attack, would you, boy?" he said, stooping to scratch the animal's thick, powerful neck.

Duke rolled onto his back and playfully pawed at the air.

"What can I do for you?" the attendant asked, as he punched the cash register keys.

"I wanted to find out some information on the man who used to own this station," I said in a loud voice. I was afraid to walk past Duke who still frolicked in the doorway. "The one who was robbed and beaten several years ago."

"Oh, yeah, I've heard about him," he said. "But he sold the station to a guy named Fred Green. I bought it from Green a couple of years ago."

"Do you know anything about the owner before Green?" I asked, still eying Duke nervously.

"A little," the man replied. He came out of the office and stood beside me. "From what I understand, he was a hell of a decent guy, as well as a top-notch mechanic. He was here alone one evening when a gang of hoodlums came in and demanded his money. He gave it to them without a fuss, but one of the guys beat him anyway. Rumor has it that it was Rodney Bedford, the prizefighter, who beat him. Anyway, I think it was his sister who found him later that night. They lived together, and she got concerned when he didn't show up at his usual time."

"Do you know the beaten man's name?" I asked.

"Not off hand," he said. "But I'm not taking any chances after what happened to him. That's why I got Duke here. He's big and lovable, but he won't let anybody mess with me or the station."

Big is right, I thought. But sure as hell not lovable. As if reading my thoughts, Duke glared at me evilly, raising his upper lip.

"Well, thanks for your time," I said quickly, eager to get out of leaping distance of the watchdog.

"That's okay," the owner said. "If you're really interested in finding out about that guy, you might want to check with that man over there." He pointed toward a white-haired man who was raking the grass on the fenced lot next door. "Name's Tom Reedy. He's lived around here forever and doesn't miss a trick."

I walked over to the fence and said, "Hello, Mr. Reedy."

The old man looked up at me and barked, "Who the devil are you?" He seemed as pleasant and friendly as Duke.

"I'm Leo Reynolds," I said. "I was wondering if you could tell me anything about the previous owner of this gas station, the one who was beaten so badly."

"What do you want to know about him?" he asked crossly.

"Anything you can tell me," I answered.

"Well, first off, he was a crazy jackass."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because he believed that everybody was basically good," Mr. Reedy said. "He figured he'd never get robbed, and he trusted everybody. He even hired bums to work for him."

"Bums?" I repeated with interest.

"Yeah, bums, the kind you see all around the city these days. He thought that a steady job would help get them back on their feet. He had a couple of them pumping gas for him. I guess he learned his lesson though."

"What do you mean?"

"One of the bums told a gang of punks when the best time was to rob the station," he explained gruffly. "I hear all they had to give the bum was five bucks for booze, and he shut off the station lights as soon as the punks arrived. Then he hightailed it to the nearest liquor store and let the hoods beat the tar out of the owner."

"The current owner of the station told me that the man's sister found him," I prodded.

"That's right," Mr. Reedy said. "And when she went into the office, she found an old lady who was drunk as a skunk going through his pockets. The old bat didn't even care that he was almost dead."

Bums and a bag lady, I thought. Could things finally be falling into place?

"What ever became of the owner?" I asked. "Did he recover?"

"If that's what you want to call it," the old man snapped. "He used

to be a healthy, strapping man, but, last I heard, he's got the mind of a five-year-old. That beating permanently messed up his head."

Struggling to control the nausea and excitement building within me, I asked, "Was his name Jeff Clayton?"

"You've got it," Mr. Reedy said. "Thank God for his sister, Jennie. If it weren't for her, they would have stuck Jeff in a home somewhere. But she's still taking care of him as far as I know."

After thanking Mr. Reedy, I hurried back to the bus stop, eager to share my newfound information with Faye. I climbed aboard the first bus that wheezed to a halt. Moments later, it turned down a street heading nowhere near my destination. Abruptly, I realized that in my haste I'd boarded the wrong bus. I yanked the cord furiously until the driver stopped the vehicle, then I ran out onto the sidewalk. It took a few more minutes to find the bus I wanted, but, finally, I was settled on a seat and watching familiar landmarks through the window.

WHEN I REACHED THE NOVELTY SHOP, FAYE WAS ALONE, smoking a cigarette and petting an apparently comatose Kitty.

"Ted Meyers stopped in about an hour ago, Leo," she said without preamble. "There was a sixth murder last night. Another bum. Shot from the same angle as the others."

"Oh, no," I moaned.

"What did you find out at the gas station, Leo?" she demanded. "You're looking frazzled."

"The brother and sister," I blurted out. "Jeff and Jennie Clayton. The brother owned the station that Bedford robbed, and he was the one who was severely beaten. That's why he's brain damaged now. Bums worked for him, and a bag lady tried to steal from him after he was unconscious."

"Slow down, Leo," Faye instructed. "Tell it to me from the beginning."

With an effort, I managed to describe my experiences at the gas station and with Mr. Reedy. When she knew the basics, I said, "That gives Jennie Clayton an awfully strong motive for wanting Bedford dead, and it might also explain why she's practicing on derelicts. She must blame them for a lot of her brother's problems."

Faye nodded, lighting another cigarette with trembling fingers. "But when does she plan to shoot Bedford?" she muttered. "He's leaving for Florida after he's finished at the sporting goods shop."

"Probably while he's at Randazzo's," I said. "But where would she be standing if she's going to follow the pattern and shoot him from above?" I snapped my fingers. "Andy's studio! I was right all along."

"The model!" Faye cried. "Gloria. Could she possibly be Jennie

Clayton?"

"Gloria had long, blonde hair, but it might have been a wig," I said. "I never did get a good look at her face, and Andy's paintings of her weren't much help."

Faye glanced at the clock on the wall. "It's five minutes to twelve, Leo. For God's sake, get over to the sporting goods shop and see what's going on."

I was already halfway out the door before Faye finished talking.

I made it to Randazzo's in record time, but the sidewalk in front of the shop was crowded with people. Apparently, Bedford had already arrived and was now inside the shop. I shoved my way to the middle of the crowd and managed a quick glimpse inside. The shop itself was jammed with people, and Rodney Bedford stood on the podium I'd seen the day before.

"There might be a shooting here," I shouted as loudly as I could. "Get away from the shop."

"Yeah, and a comet might fall on top of us, too," a burly man snarled at me. "Take off, jerk."

"I'm serious," I protested. "I've got to warn Bedford and the fans inside the shop before it's too late."

"If you wanted to get closer to Rodney, you shoulda gotten here earlier," an elderly woman scolded. "No one here is dumb enough to fall for that crap." She gave me a sharp elbow in the ribs.

Grunting with pain, I tried to see into the shop again. I maneuvered far enough to the right to get a clear view of the wall adjoining Andy's studio. There were two holes, one several inches above the other, which hadn't been there on Thursday.

"Get out of here!" I roared at the top of my lungs.

"Drunk!" the old woman snapped, then caught me with a sudden left hook to the chin. Chuckling, she said, "I haven't been a fight fan all these years for nothing."

So much for crowd control, I thought, feeling as effective as Kevin McCarthy in *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*.

Holding my throbbing jaw, I fought my way out of the mob and stumbled over to the stairway leading to Andy's studio. I rushed up the steps, wondering if I shouldn't have tried this approach to begin with. I twisted the knob only to discover that the door was locked.

I knocked loudly, but there was no response. I kicked at the door in frustration and threw my shoulder against it. It remained firm. I shouldered it again and again until finally the door began to rattle. Then, suddenly, the wood around the knob began to splinter, and the door gave way against my weight.

Andy was lying in front of the nearly completed canvas of Gloria. I hurried over to him and rolled him onto his side. Though unconscious, he was breathing. Blood oozed from his thick brown hair.

"You're going to have to wait, Andy," I muttered, then stepped over to the wall. Two holes had been bored there, and a hand drill lay on the floor nearby. I peered through the top hole. It gave a clear view of Rodney Bedford standing at the podium at the back of Randazzo's shop. The lower hole was certainly for the barrel of the gun.

The din from next door could be plainly heard in Andy's studio. As I watched, Rodney Bedford raised his arms for silence. When the crowd grew still, he announced in a booming voice, "I'm real glad to see all you folks here today to cheer on the next world champ." The crowd responded with whistles and enthusiastic shouts.

But where was Gloria-Jennie? I wondered. Where was the gun? Had she decided not to go through with her demented plan after all?

I drew my head away from the hole and received the answer to those questions in the form of a sharp blow to my head. As my lids sagged over my eyes, I caught the briefest glimpse of a nude with long blonde hair wielding a shiny wand.

A woodland nymph, I thought. She tapped me with her magical wand.

She tapped again, and I was completely out.

I AWOKE WITH THE FIRM CONVICTION THAT I HADN'T BEEN tapped with a wand. I opened my eyes a crack and spotted a length of metal pipe lying a few feet away. One hell of a lethal wand! Beside the pipe was a bare foot. I moved my gaze upward along an expanse of smooth, shapely leg, but everything above the thigh was hidden by a mass of cascading blonde hair. Jennie was standing at the wall with her back to me.

Without thinking, I reached out, grabbed the hair, and yanked. It came off easily and slid to the floor just as an explosion rattled the room.

A second explosion followed a moment later, and the sounds of pandemonium erupted from Randazzo's shop. The screams and cries of Rodney Bedford's fans echoed through the wall as the mass of people thronged toward the doorway.

I leaped to my feet, grabbed Gloria-Jennie, and threw her to the floor. My head ached with an excruciating pain, but a strange thought still flitted through my mind — I had never before treated a naked woman so roughly.

When Jennie looked up at me, I concentrated on her face rather than

her lovely body. Surrounded by short, brown hair, her expression revealed rage and anguish.

"You idiot!" she shrieked. "At least, I got Bedford before you stopped me."

She glanced toward the revolver which still protruded from the wall, its barrel locked into the hole. As she lunged toward it, I grabbed the gun and wrenched it from the wall.

"Put some clothes on," I commanded.

Calmly, Jennie stepped over to a pile of clothes on the floor and began to dress. She appeared spent and weary, but there was a pride to her exhaustion as well. She reminded me of a woman who had achieved her major goal in life; even though the cost and sacrifice had been tremendous.

"Where's Jeff?" I asked.

"He's with the old woman who lives in the apartment next to ours," she answered. "He's been staying with her all the while I've been modeling for Andy."

"You've killed the bums and bag ladies, haven't you?"

She nodded without hesitation. "They're scum. The world's better off with them gone. Just like it's better off without Bedford. I knew I'd only have this one chance to get him so I had to be certain I could do it right. That's why the practice was necessary. And I only used worthless targets."

Jennie faced me, buttoning her blouse. "Did you know that Bedford made my brother the way he is?" she asked softly. "He beat him so badly during a robbery that Jeff will never be the same again. He used to be bright and talented. He liked everyone and believed in the essential goodness of man. Thanks to Bedford and some of his miserable friends, Jeff's a walking vegetable now." Tears brimmed in her eyes, then streamed slowly down her cheeks. "I didn't really believe I'd get away with this, but at least I've avenged my brother and rid the world of some trash."

"What's going to become of your brother now?" I asked.

"He'll end up in an institution somewhere," she said. "But he's beyond caring. As long as he's fed and looked after, he's content."

Andy groaned, and Jennie and I both looked over at him.

"I didn't want to hurt Andy," she said. "But it was the only way I could do what I had to do. He was so wrapped up in his painting that he didn't even notice me coming at him with the pipe."

"You asked Andy for a job as a model just so that you could be here to get Bedford?" I muttered incredulously.

Gloria nodded. "As soon as I saw the poster that Bedford would be at the sporting goods shop, I started making plans."

At that instant, we heard the clatter of footsteps rushing up the stairs. Two policemen burst into the studio, holding guns.

"This is your killer," I said, gesturing toward Jennie.

She looked at the policemen without shame or remorse. "Bedford is dead, isn't he?" she asked.

"No," one of the cops replied. "But his right arm is completely shattered."

"Not dead," Jennie moaned. Then she began to weep as the cop grasped her arm and led her toward the doorway.

EVENINGS AT FAYE'S SHOP ARE A STRANGE COMBINATION OF tranquillity and chaos. Usually, Faye and I sit alone chatting or quietly enjoying each other's company. Faye pets her latest feline stray. We both smoke. Outside, though, the sounds of the city remind me of an inferno. The shrill wail of ambulances, the crazy shrieks of police sirens, shouts from the patrons of Gilbert's bar on the corner, the roar of traffic and the squeal of brakes at the end of the block. For me, the novelty shop is a haven in the midst of turmoil.

At nine-thirty that Friday night, Faye and I sat alone. We had not spoken for almost half an hour when Faye said, "I wonder if Bedford would rather be dead."

"I wouldn't doubt it one bit," I said. "Boxing was his only claim to fame, and he'll never fight again. There's even a chance that he'll still lose his arm completely."

"It's hard to feel sorry for him," Faye sighed.

"And it's hard to blame Jennie Clayton for what she did," I added. "No, I guess I don't really mean that."

"Yes, you do, Leo," Faye said. "And I know exactly how you feel. There's no excuse for murder, but the poor woman couldn't have been sane. The ones I feel sorry for are the bums and bag ladies, those pathetic people she used for target practice."

I nodded. "I hope that Jeff Clayton is well taken care of wherever he ends up."

"So do I," Faye agreed, slipping a cigarette from the pack before her.

"You know, Faye, if my book ever makes me famous, I don't think I'll attend any autographing sessions," I said.

"I don't think you have to worry, Leo."

I wasn't sure if Faye doubted that I'd ever complete *Michelangelo's Dropcloth* or that I'd ever become famous or that I had any murderous enemies.

I decided not to ask for clarification.



MIGHTIEST ADVENTURES!

THE INCOMPARABLE
BATMAN
and ROBIN

THE BOY WONDER

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13
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THRILLS!

EDWARD NORRIS
EDDIE QUILLAN
DOUGLASS DUMBRIE
LOIS COLLIER
TALA BIRELL
RUTH ROMAN
CLARENCE MUSE

Marks played with the ham radio dial, searching, listening. Nothing but static. Then silence. Static again and then — something else . . .

And One By The Road

by THOM MONTGOMERY

SINCE THE RODEO ACCIDENT THREE YEARS PREVIOUSLY which had left him paralyzed from the waist down, nothing had given Chuck Marks as much pleasure as the ham radio set his friend Ed Garcia of the New Mexico Highway Patrol in Dukes County had helped him set up.

He'd only had it for two weeks, and the storm of the last four days had raised so much interference Marks hadn't been able to use it much. Anxious to get in all the practice he could before college reopened after the Christmas holidays, when Sunday morning had dawned almost clear, Marks ate his breakfast rapidly, excused himself from the table, and wheeled himself out to the office-shed where the transmitter had been set up.

The small drifts of snow on the covered walkway between the house and the shed were no obstacle to the wheelchair, and Marks enjoyed the trail of snow flurries he raised as he passed through the thin skiffs.

Inside the shed, he flipped the set on and picked up the leather bound operator's manual Ed Garcia had given him, and flipped through it while the set warmed. When it was ready, Marks turned on the receiver. "Help me," came the voice.

At first Marks wasn't sure he'd heard it. Then it came again, more frantic this time. "Daddy! He won't wake up! Daddy! I'm hurt, Daddy!" The voice ended in a long wail. Marks wasn't sure if the sound was an atmospheric disturbance or a continuation of the broadcast. Then as the wailing reached a peak, it was choked off, to become a coughing, sobbing sound.

There was a sudden silence, then a young, tear-filled voice spoke again, pleading. "Wake up, wake up! I hurt! Daddy!"

There was static then, and more crying. Marks picked up his manual again, turning to the section on broadcasting. Depressing the key as the instructions noted, he spoke directly into the microphone in front of him.

"This is W6ZN, W6ZN. Do you read me? Do you read me?" Marks released the key. Only the sound of the crying came through.

Marks thought the matter over for a moment. Obviously, some kid was hurt and couldn't wake his father. That sounded like there had been an accident of some sort which had injured the boy's father. The boy was apparently injured too. And whatever had happened, had happened near a radio set.

But was the set turned on by the father or by the boy himself? Most likely, by the father. The boy wasn't trying to broadcast, he was only trying to wake his father.

Yet . . .

JUST IN CASE, MARKS AGAIN DEPRESSED THE SENDING KEY.
"This is W6ZN," he repeated, "If you read me, please acknowledge." Then realizing he didn't know how old the boy might be, he added, "If you hear me, say so." He released the key.

There was nothing but the now tired, choked sobbing.

No longer hesitating, Chuck Marks noted the frequency on which the call had come, turned off the speaker, and wheeled himself over to the telephone on the work table his father had built when they converted the shed into Marks' office.

Lifting the receiver, he dialled the number for the Highway Patrol office in Newkirk. To his relief, the call was answered immediately.

"Is Ed Garcia there," Marks asked.

"Sorry," said the operator. "He's been called out to the scene of an accident."

"Accident? Is there a kid involved," Marks asked, feeling slightly deflated.

"No, no kid. Is this Chuck Marks?"

"Uh, yeah."

"Thought I recognized your voice," the operator said. Chuck, this is Benny Montoya. Ed's been called out on Interstate 50. Some guy reported a man shot to death in his car. He'll be back pretty quick. But if it's an emergency, maybe I can help you."

Marks filled the operator in on the voice he'd heard, and recapped his thoughts. "I don't think the boy's old enough to know how to transmit. The way I see it, he's caught not too far from an open mike."

"Damn," Montoya said. "Okay, Chuck, I'll pass this on. Let's just hope the kid doesn't turn the set off before we can triangulate in on him — if he doesn't know how to operate it, maybe we can locate him before the battery dies down."

The process of triangulation was one with which Marks was only vaguely familiar, but he knew enough about it to know that by using three receivers at different points, the direction and eventually the source of a radio broadcast could be pinpointed.

"Let me know what happens, Benny," he said. "I'll sign off now."

"Okay, Chuck," the operator replied. "Oh, listen, do you want Ed to call you when he gets back?"

"Uh, sure, if he gets a chance," Marks replied. He hung up then, and sat for a moment in thought. There was something wrong with the mental picture he'd drawn for himself and Montoya.

The voice had called for "Daddy." The voice had called for "Daddy." The voice said "I'm hurt." What else was there? Oh yes, the voice had claimed that "Daddy" wouldn't wake up. Or had it?

Executing a turn in his chair, Marks returned to the set. Turning the speaker back on and making certain that the receiving key was on, he waited, listening intently.

There was nothing but static. Nervously and with a little anxiety, Marks played with the dial, moving it slightly right and left.

Still nothing.

The voice was silent now. Static filled the air. Static, and . . .

Marks' heart skipped a beat. There was something else! There'd been a rustling noise, a noise like silk or like one of those miracle fabrics coats were made of now. The more attentively Marks listened, the more certain he was.

The ringing of the telephone interrupted his listening. Impatiently, he returned to the work table, leaving the receiver of the set on.

"Hello," he said, adjusting the 'phone so that his ear nearest the set was free, "Chuck here."

"Chuck, Ed Garcia," came the familiar growl. "What's up, pardner? Montoya says you reported an accident."

"I guess it's an accident," Marks said carefully. Again, he went through the story. "Thing is, all there is now is some static and what I'm sure is the kid's coat rustling, like he was trying to move around. Can you triangulate on something that faint?"

"Could be a problem," Garcia stated. "Let me check with rescue and see what's up." The patrolman put the line on hold.

So it was already in the hands of the rescue team! Marks was glad. After a brief wait, Garcia came back on the line. "They can't hear anything," he told Marks, "but they'll continue trying for a little longer. You sure you're not just hearing static?"

Marks grinned. "Positive, Ed. I've listened to enough static the last few days to know the difference!"

"I take it you tried to operate the set during yesterday's storm," Garcia chuckled.

"Yesterday's and the day before that and the day before that! Listen, man, I plan to make this thing a full time hobby. I've already made contact with a geologist named Mark Whelan in Albuquerque. He's got a ham set at his Sandia cabin, and we hit it off right away. We've even fixed it to call each other every Wednesday. That's when he's at the cabin. Some sort of field headquarters. He's a great guy, really great!"

"Glad you're enjoying the set, Chuck."

"You bet, man," Marks said enthusiastically. "Best suggestion I ever had! Glad you made it!"

"Forget it," Garcia replied, half embarrassed. "I just had the idea — you did all the work. Listen, I'll call you back in a bit. I've got some paper work to do, and as soon as I get it out of the way, I'll check on your kid and report back to you."

"Hey, that's right," Marks said, remembering. "You had a shooting to investigate today. What was it? Hunting accident?"

Garcia was silent for awhile. "No," he said carefully, "no, it looks like robbery and murder."

At first Marks didn't know what to say. "Murder?" he finally asked. "Do you know who did it? Do you know who the victim is?"

"Don't really know who did it," Garcia told him, "but the victim is Ellison Danvers."

"Danvers," Mark said, "The rancher north of here?"

"Danvers the rancher, Danvers the Senator, Danvers the oilman,

uranium king, and playboy. The one and the same."

Marks whistled lowly.

"You better believe it," Garcia commented wryly. "The governor has already been on the phone. A special unit has been sent out from Santa Fe."

"When did it all happen?"

"Best we can figure it, some time last night around ten-thirty to midnight. Motorist spotted the car about three, and I've been on the scene since about four. Trouble is, with this cold weather we can't tell for sure. Have to wait for a full autopsy. But he ate at the Hacienda Cafe at ten last night — or rather, got two hamburgers and a coffee to go, and was about ten minutes down the road."

"And he was robbed?"

"Yeah," Garcia said with a puzzled tone.

"You don't sound too sure," Marks commented.

"Well, guess I can tell you. When I notified his wife, she wasn't at all surprised. She was upset."

"That's natural."

"No, I mean she was upset when we got there. Like she already knew about it."

"But . . ."

"But's the word for it, Chuck old boy. There's something damned fishy going on. We got there before dawn, and lights were on all over the place, she'd been crying, and she was scared as hell when she saw it was the Highway Patrol. Wouldn't say a word, just thanked us. But I have a hunch we're going to have to talk with her plenty before this case is over."

MARKS WAS SILENT FOR SEVERAL MINUTES AFTER HANGING up the phone. Ellison Danvers was the richest man in the State, or so well-founded talk had it. A tough, hard-bitten man who'd inherited as much of his father's grit as he had his money, Danvers had been in on every money making gamble the State had seen.

His father's ranch had been the first step and the foundation of Ellison Danvers' later accumulations. He'd sunk money into and pulled money out of uranium, oil and even a silver mine. And when he'd made his money, he'd gone into politics. His flashy, almost Texas way of life had earned him an unprecedented popularity — that and the fact that despite his new riches, his ranch placed him among New Mexico's "old" families.

Then five years ago, he had flown to Hollywood for a look at a fading movie studio who wanted some of his money, and he'd come back

without the studio, but with its brightest — and only — leading lady.

Ann Jeanette Rockland was one of those solid, sleek Hollywood women, resembling Jane Russell in figure and face, and Marilyn Monroe in gestures and voice. She'd apparently been content to give up her film career for the Danvers' ranch. Since her marriage, no one had heard much about her. Her two biggest films, GOBBLER FROM THE GROUND and GONE, GONE GERTRUDE were shown once in a while on the Saturday night Fright Flicks — a tribute from the State broadcasters — but she gave out no interviews and had never made another picture.

Now Danvers was dead, and his wife wasn't acting any too straight.

Gradually, Marks became aware of someone talking. "I can't raise him," the voice was saying. "The S.O.B. must have gone to sleep — or gotten ahold of a bottle somewhere."

It startled him at first, until he realized he'd left the receiver on. He wheeled over to the set. "Damn it, Larry," the voice was saying, "come in. Acknowledge this call damn it!"

Marks depressed the sending key. "This is W6ZN," he identified himself. "W6ZN," he repeated. "Are you with the boy?"

There was a sudden silence at the other end of the line. Then Marks heard a voice in the background. "I don't know," someone said, and another voice replied "Well, cut the transmission, you idiot!"

A sound of movement, and then nothing but static. Then came Montoya's voice.

"W6ZN? This is the highway patrol. Was that the call you heard earlier, the same voice? We've got a fix if it is."

"W6ZN here. No. I don't know who that was, Benny. I don't think it's related." Marks frowned. "I didn't get the first part of their call. What was going on?"

"As far as we can tell, someone who didn't know too much about operating a set was trying to reach a friend named Larry. He never came on, whoever 'Larry' was."

"Oh," Marks said.

"We'll stay on and monitor for another hour. But I think we've lost contact with your kid."

"Say, how come you're at the rescue desk, Benny?" Marks wondered suddenly.

"When rescue raised this call, they thought they might have the wrong frequency. I just stepped over to double check when your call came through."

"Well, it's the right frequency, just the wrong voice," Marks said.

"We'll stay on then," Montoya assured him. "At least for another

hour."

Instinctively, Marks looked at his watch. He was surprised to find it was only nine o'clock. "Only an hour?" he asked.

"Well, you know, Chuck. Now and then someone gets it in their head that it's funny to broadcast a false emergency. They think they're going to pull some great stunt, like Wells' broadcast of WAR OF THE WORLDS or something. We've had everything from broadcasts claiming to be from outer space to a dozen calls every summer about lost people who don't exist. It makes our work all the harder. We try to investigate every call, but there's a limit on the amount of time we can spare. If your kid is really in trouble, he'll be back on the air — unless he's cut the radio off. In that case there isn't anything we can do. But we'll monitor awhile longer."

AFTER SIGNING OFF, MARKS WHEELED HIMSELF TO THE door of his office. He felt a curious mixture of deflation and embarrassment. He'd been excited at the prospect of helping in a rescue effort, but it looked like he might have just passed on a false alarm.

Thoughtfully he looked out over the expanse of the New Mexico flatland to the low rise of grey malpais and the mesa beyond. The panic in that youthful voice had been too real, that weird wailing too strange to be a fake.

No, Marks thought, out there in the desert somewhere was a boy trapped and injured. A boy whose father was unconscious or dead.

Well, he told himself, it's in the hands of the police now. The rescue squad would take care of it. There was nothing more he could do.

With resignation, Marks wheeled himself out on the walkway, pulling the door to the office closed behind him. Slowly he wheeled himself back to the house.

As he reached the side door leading to the porch and the kitchen, he noticed casually that Old Blue, the Ford he'd bought just before his accident, was gone from the driveway. Dad must have gone into town, he thought, pushing his chair over the low doorsill and into the kitchen.

A note on the dining table confirmed this:

Chuck, we drove into Newkirk to do the laundry
and some grocery shopping. We'll be gone most
of the day. There's soup and sandwich stuff.

Mom and Dad.

The house seemed strangely empty as it always did when he was alone. Marks went into the living room and turned on the television.

Picking up his geology text book, he started reading.

An old Gene Autry film was on, and the sound of the dialogue and action made the house seem less lonely. But Marks wasn't interested in that. Nor, he found, was he able to concentrate on the geology text.

Sunlight streamed through the deep set windows in the adobe wall, deceptively warm. Marks could see the barren fruit tree lined against the cold blue and white of the sky and drifting clouds.

For the next hour, Marks studied moodily, without progressing. When he realized he was reading the same page for the third time, he closed the book, turned the television off, and returned to the kitchen. He hesitated only briefly before again leaving the house for his office.

In the hands of the police or not, he had to know what was happening.

He heard the crying before he got inside the office. Hurrying to open the door, he fumbled with the knob. "Damn," he said to himself. The knob had always been tricky. He'd meant to tighten it, but hadn't gotten around to it yet.

Opening the door finally, he wheeled in and over to the set. Have to remember to turn it off before I leave, he mentally chided himself, but I'm glad I didn't this time.

It was the same voice. Marks had heard earlier. "Daddy," it called, "I want to go home! Take me home, Daddy! I don't like it here! I hurt!"

Marks bit his lower lip thoughtfully, and debated about calling Garcia again. He decided not to, knowing the patrolman was busy. Instead, he decided to call Montoya. After all, Montoya had said they would only monitor for an hour, and the time was up.

With the boy crying softly in the background, Marks went to the telephone and dialled the Patrol. A new voice, not Montoya's, answered.

Identifying himself and asking for Montoya, Marks was told that Benny Montoya was off duty. Marks asked for someone on the rescue squad.

"I'll put Lieutenant Sandoval on," said the operator. Marks was placed on hold.

"Listen," said the voice behind Marks, "something's gone wrong." It took Marks a second to recognize the speaker as the man who had called "Larry" earlier.

"What is it," said a second voice.

"I tell you something's gone wrong. Larry's bungled it! Listen to that kid crying. I'll bet Larry hit the bottle and passed out."

"Damn," cursed the second voice. "What the hell . . ."

"You're the one who wanted him in on this case! You said he was off the juice!"

"He swore he . . ."

"His word isn't worth the air it takes him to talk. He's an alky. Always has been."

"All he had to do was snatch the kid from the car and bring him here. A fool could've done it."

"Well, he didn't. Now he's fouled it. And God knows where he's at. Or what he's done. The first big job, and a damned alky has to blow it!" There was a thump and then nothing but the child's soft and now fading crying.

"Sandoval here," crackled the telephone, "Can I help you?"

Marks was startled and confused. He wasn't quite sure of the meaning of the conversation he had overheard. He shrugged it off and turned his attention to Sandoval.

"Uh, this is Chuck Marks. I reported a distress call earlier, and . . ."

"Oh yeah. The kid calling for help. We listened in for an hour total, Mr. Marks, but we didn't hear anything. We quit monitoring about fifteen minutes ago."

"Well, Lieutenant, I just got back to my set, and I can hear the kid again . . ."

"Just a second," Sandoval said quickly. There was a short silence, and then he returned to the line. "Okay, we've got it now."

"Great," Marks said with relief. "I'll cut off now."

As he hung up, a burst of static interrupted the crying behind him. And then the set was silent except for the faint hum of its transistors.

MARKS FRETTED FOR THE REST OF THE MORNING AND WELL into the afternoon.

There had been no further word from the boy in distress, and the rescue team had marked the call off as a hoax.

At least, Marks told himself, they know I didn't fake the call. Yet he couldn't bring himself to believe that the matter was all a hoax. But he knew that without further broadcasts and without further proof, there wasn't anything else the police could do.

He would have liked to talk his frustration out with his parents or with a friend. Yet he didn't want to bother Ed Garcia and he knew it would be useless to discuss it with any of his friends from school.

He tried monitoring the frequency himself, aching in every fibre for the call to be repeated, but the set remained mute.

The hours, the minutes, dragged slowly by. It was with a sense of

relief that Marks heard the telephone ringing.

The caller was Ed Garcia.

"We're going to file the report on your call," he told Marks. "Just thought you'd like to hear it first."

Marks couldn't help but feel a touch of pride surmounting the day's frustration as Garcia read the brief official report. The time of Marks' first call, the note of his second and then his third call, with the addendum that the Rescue Unit had, indeed, heard the child's voice, but too briefly for triangulation.

"Anything you want to add," Garcia asked.

"No, only . . ."

"Yeah?"

"There's nothing in the report about the other call."

"Other call?" Garcia sounded surprised.

"I mean transmission. Rescue caught someone on the same frequency trying to raise a guy named Larry. It didn't have anything to do with the kid, it was just a snatch of conversation . . ." Marks stopped.

He hardly heard Garcia explaining that only germane information was entered on the official report. What he did hear was a mental replay of the second, "Larry" transmission.

"All he had to do was snatch the kid."

The two men had been talking about a kidnapping! And Larry was the man who was supposed to have actually done it. Marks cursed himself for a fool. He should have reported that second broadcast, but he'd been confused about it, and concerned only with the child.

He interrupted Garcia to outline his thoughts. "It's got to have something to do with the kid I heard," he concluded excitedly. "Nothing else makes sense!"

"I don't know, Chuck," Garcia said skeptically. "It's a long shot guess on your part. We haven't had any reports of a kidnapping, and any way, what kid around here is worth snatching?"

"It doesn't have to be from around here," Marks pointed out. "Don't forget, my set's pretty powerful even if it is one of the smaller models. I got that guy, Mark Whelan, near Albuquerque. We don't know where this broadcast came from. It could even have originated in Arizona."

"You have a point," Garcia conceded, "and if you heard that broadcast correctly, there *has* been a kidnapping somewhere. We'll get on it. But don't expect too much, Chuck," he warned. "We don't have anything to go on."

"But you do," Marks exclaimed. "Montoya said they got a fix on that first broadcast."

"Hey, now, that's a different story! If they got a fix on it, maybe they made a note of it and kept it."

Marks was startled. "You mean they might not have kept it?"

"There wouldn't have been a reason to at the time. But hold on. I'll find out soon enough."

Once again Marks found himself placed on hold. He grinned nervously. Wait, wait, wait, he thought.

Garcia came back on the line. "No luck, old boy. Looks like it was thrown out."

Again Marks was deflated. "Wouldn't it be in the waste basket?"

"No luck there, either. I thought of that. Apparently the trash was emptied when the shift changed."

There was nothing else that could be done. Garcia said they would monitor the frequency again on the chance another call might come through. "But it doesn't look likely," he added. "By now they'll have given up trying to raise their buddy on the radio. Looks like we're plain out of luck, old boy."

"Yeah, guess so," Marks conceded gloomily. "You having any luck with your murder case?"

"No, not much. No evidence to point to Mrs. Danvers, just my suspicions. The State boys, the big wigs, want me to soft peddle my treatment of her. She's big money now that she's the widow Danvers. But they didn't see her when she got the news. If they had, they'd let me go all out. That woman was scared when she saw the police at her door."

"Ah, I wouldn't worry, Ed. If she's guilty, you'll catch her."

"It'll take some doing to prove. And with her money she can hire a battery of lawyers to make a fool of any evidence I may find. Oh well, I'll do my best and leave it to the courts."

MARKS WAS THOROUGHLY DEPRESSED WHEN HE HUNG UP the telephone. I'm as useless as an old shoe, he told himself. Can't walk, can't do a thing. And there isn't anything I can do to stop this kidnapping. Just sit and wait, sit and wait.

He rolled his chair over to the door which he opened. The sun was already low and had been obscured by the clouds which were beginning to gather thickly against the western horizon.

Like the mesa was catching them, Marks thought. Catching them and rolling them up. I wonder if it looked anything like this when the malpais was formed. If the old volcano which formed it ever sent up white billowing smoke?

Thoughts of the formation reminded Marks that he hadn't yet done

any real studying in his geology book. His grades in that class weren't strong enough to warrant leaving the work undone too long.

And thoughts of his geology text reminded him of the geologist, Mark Whelan, whom he had "met" by radio the previous Wednesday, the day before the storm broke.

Be nice to call him, Marks thought. And boy will I have something to tell him this time!

If only there was something I could do, he thought. If only they would broadcast again, so the police could get their location! He turned his chair to face the room.

The radio set hummed warmly. The light that came through the doorway formed a shaft of light to the floor in which dust motes rose and fell, a tiny universe in motion. Everything seemed so normal and calm!

The idea came to Marks then.

If I knew their call letters, maybe I could raise them. Pretend to be Larry, slur my voice, act drunk. Get them to tell me where they are, pretend I forgot.

He wheeled over to the set. It hummed at him mockingly. He looked at the frequency indicator. It seemed to remind him of something.

Marks cocked his head at an angle. There was something significant he was missing, something important. Marks frowned.

He let his thoughts drift back. He'd come out here this morning, turned on the set, let it warm. He'd tuned in on the strange broadcast . . . No. He hadn't tuned in the broadcast. It had already been on when he turned on the receiving switch. That meant it had been preset!

He hadn't changed the setting since his last attempt to transmit. Okay, Marks said to himself, so what? So his log book would show who he had tried to raise. So?

He reached for the small notebook in which he kept a record of his calls and transmissions received.

His last call had been an attempt to reach Mark Whelan. It was the same frequency on which the radio was now set.

Marks remembered now. He'd wondered if Whelan had been caught by the storm that had started last Thursday. He had tried to call, but had given it up because the interference was too great.

But did it mean anything? Surely Whelan wouldn't be in on a kidnapping. He was a successful geologist. He seemed like such a great guy. He had a terrific personality.

And he also had a cabin with a radio set. A cabin that was empty all week.

It was a long shot, but Marks decided to try it. If only Mark Whelan's set was like his, with the call letters printed on a metal plate attached to the set, and if only he was right and luck was with him, maybe there was something he could do.

It was worth a try.

His hands sweating from nervousness, Marks depressed the send key. "Calling B8KL," he said in a slurred voice. "Calling B8KL, this is Larry. Larry calling." He hoped he sounded drunk enough. "Calling B8KL," he repeated. On his third try, he got a reply.

"Larry? What the hell happened?"

"I got a little lost," Marks slurred.

"Lost hell, you got drunk! Is the kid still with you or did you let him get away?"

"Naw," Marks coughed, "He's here. He's asleep."

"Well, get your tail on up here," the voice ordered.

"Uh, you know, I forgot how to get there. I got lost."

"Crap," said the voice, irritated. "All right, where are you? Route 66?"

"Yeah," Marks said, his heart beating faster.

"Okay," the voice went on.

Marks noted the instruction carefully. "I'll be there in about an hour," he said when the voice finished.

After signing off, Marks released the transmitting key and rolled himself to the work table where he called the Highway Patrol.

He started to outline to Ed Garcia what he had done. "So it was you," Garcia exploded. "We caught the call. Our men are on their way from the Albuquerque station. That was a damn fool stunt you pulled. You might have muffed it. Hey, and how'd you know what call letters to ask for?"

Marks explained about the log book briefly.

"Well, that was smart thinking, but next time, let us pros handle the work."

"Sure, Ed," Marks said contritely. "But I was just afraid I was wrong, and I wanted to do something myself. I still hope Whelan isn't involved."

"We'll find out soon enough," Garcia said.

"And you'll let me know how it turns out," Marks asked.

Garcia gave an exasperated sigh. "Yeah. I'll report to you as soon as I hear anything. I get off at six. If we've heard anything by then, I'll deliver the news to you personally. And maybe tan your hide for you."

Marks just grinned.

HE WAS READING HIS GEOLOGY TEXT IN THE LIVING ROOM when the headlights of Ed Garcia's patrol car flashed through the window at six thirty that evening. Marks wheeled to the front door and opened it.

"Well?" he said as Garcia came toward the door. "What happened? Do you know?"

Garcia grinned as he entered the house, closing the door behind him. "You know what you've done," he stated. "You just helped us solve a kidnapping and a murder."

"What?" Marks responded, his eyebrows raised.

"Yeah. Seems the kid you heard belonged to Danvers."

"Danvers," Marks was truly surprised. "I didn't know he had any children."

"Hardly anybody did. Danvers and his wife adopted a Vietnam war orphan, and put the kibosh on any publicity. The only people who knew were a few close friends and the ranch hands. This Larry, Larry Ryan, worked for Danvers. He'd been hiding out from a Chicago warrant, using the ranch hand work as a cover.

"He knew about the kid, and wrote some of his buddies back in Chicago. They came out to Albuquerque and scouted up what they thought was a good hideout in Whelan's cabin. Near a road, but empty most of the time. The only problem they had was the fact Danvers was crazy about the kid and never let him off the ranch. They didn't want to make their move on the ranch itself, too many loyal Danvers hands.

"But that was solved when the kid caught a cold. Danvers couldn't get a doctor to go out to the ranch to look at the kid, so he drove the kid into town. Ryan was waiting for just such a move.

"He followed Danvers in the ranch pick up, waited for his chance, which he got when Danvers stopped at the Hacienda Cafe. But he waited just a little too long. Danvers came out before Ryan could get the kid. So apparently Ryan just walked up and asked for a ride back to the ranch. When Danvers leaned over to open the door, Ryan shot him."

"Nobody heard the shot," Marks asked incredulously.

"On that parking lot that late at night? Listen, the Hacienda's right by the highway. If anybody had heard the shot, they'd have just thought it was a car or truck backfiring."

"Oh," Marks said.

"Anyway, Ryan then put the kid — he's only five — in the pick up, then hooked the car to the hitch and towed it up the highway, where he left it, intending to come back later.

"If he wasn't drunk when he did all this, he got drunk on his way to

the Sandias. We figure he was pretty well loaded, tried to call his buddies in the Whelan cabin, and lost control of the wheel. He rammed into the cliff at a sharp turn, and was killed. He'd tied the kid down and had seat-belted him in, which probably saved the kid's life. The boy was hungry and scared, but otherwise okay."

"Whew," Marks sighed.

"As for Mrs. Danvers, the kidnappers had called her, and our news of the death of her husband reinforced the kidnappers orders not to call the cops. At least I got two points rights. She had some knowledge, and she was petrified when she saw us. She had too many worries to be surprised."

Headlights flashed in the room as a car pulled in to the driveway and circled the patrol car. Through the window, Marks saw his parents get out and his mother coming up the walk, a basket of clean clothing in her hands.

Garcia opened the door for her. "Everything okay, Ed?" she asked.

"Sure," he responded.

Mr. Marks came in second, carrying two bags of groceries. "Just put them in the kitchen, Tom," Mrs. Marks said. "What'd you do today, Chuck?"

"Not much," he said. "Just fiddled with the radio and did some studying, that's all."

Garcia started to say something, but Marks shook his head.

"I hope you studied some in your geology," Mrs. Marks was saying. "You need some extra work there."

"I worked on it some," Marks said.

Garcia smiled.



"GARR CASTLE IS ROBBED"

Chapter 8
of the nerve-lashing

Chapter-Play
Edgar Wallace's "**THE GREEN ARCHER**" starring VICTOR JORY
A COLUMBIA CHAPTER-PLAY

It was an embarrassing situation, but it could be handled quite easily — with a few bullets shot in the right direction!

Unfair Warning

by DAN J. MARLOWE

THE BIG BLOND MAN LOOKED UP ABRUPTLY WHEN HIS office door opened unceremoniously. His unannounced visitor seated himself uninvited, and the blond man's light-colored eyes narrowed slightly although his lips curved in what could have been a smile.

"Yes, Ted?" he said softly.

Ted Lindsay sprawled in the chair across the desk. He was a man of 35 with small, dark, intense-looking eyes behind rimless glasses. He turned his head to read aloud in a deliberate tone the reversed black lettering on the office door. "Lieutenant Joseph Conway," he pronounced. "How's the youngest police lieutenant in the state today, Joe? Had time to set your sights yet on the captain's office?"

Conway had gone to school with Ted Lindsay. He wondered if Lindsay had ever realized how close he had come once or twice to taking too much for granted. "I'd say things are just fine, Ted," he said easily. "Why the visit? Someone you'd like arrested?"

"I might, at that," Lindsay said as if the idea had just occurred to him. "But no, I really came by to bring you up to date on current events in town. Are you coming to the game tonight?"

"I'm speaking at the Boys' Club."

Lindsay grinned. "Still politicking, eh? Dave Corbin really doesn't know what kind of a tiger he has on his tail, does he?"

Corbin was the police chief, Conway's boss. "You mentioned current events," Conway said in a patient tone.

"We haven't seen you much at the game lately," Lindsay returned obliquely. "Turned your back on it?"

"I've been a little busy."

"I wonder." Lindsay's dark eyes were probing. "Could it be that the youngest police lieutenant in the state now feels it's indiscreet to be a regular in the town's high stakes poker game? I can remember when that game was mighty good to you."

"I wouldn't disagree."

"I don't mean just financially," Lindsay persisted. "I can remember when Big Joe Conway was a raggedy-assed kid fresh out of school playing in a game he couldn't afford because some of the so-called better people in town played in it. Like Doc Morrissey. And Judge Schofield." He grinned again. "You going to marry Ann Schofield, Joe? I've been hearing rumors."

Conway looked up at the wall clock. "You're going to make me late for dinner."

"At Judge Schofield's?" Lindsay inquired. He waved a negligent hand. "Don't let me detain you."

"You must have had a reason for stopping in here."

Lindsay nodded. "I asked you if you were coming to the game tonight."

"You did." Conway waited. Lindsay said nothing. "There's a reason I should come?"

"There, now," Lindsay said in an approving tone. "The bright young police official doesn't need to be hit in the head more than four or five times, does he?" He removed a small brown notebook from his shirt pocket.

CONWAY HAD SEEN THE NOTEBOOK BEFORE. TED LINDSAY was a figure filbert who kept book of the winnings and losings of everyone who sat in the town's weekly poker game. An estimate of Conway's own winnings in the days he had been a steady player was so close to the fact that Conway had determined never to underestimate Ted Lindsay.

"I thought you might like to come by, Joe, and take a lesson from the man who —" Lindsay glanced down at his opened notebook " — in the last eleven sessions won fifty-one thousand dollars."

"THOUSAND?" Conway had stiffened in his chair.

"Thousand. Cheerful winner, too."

"Who the hell is losing that kind of money? What kind of limit are you maniacs playing? This town can't stand that kind of noise."

"I wouldn't call it a noisy process."

"Was it you, Ted?"

"It was not, sad to relate, Joey."

"Who dropped the bundle, then? No one around here could afford to lose fifty-one hundred."

"Don't get shook, Lieutenant. The bank's still safe. You've been out of touch. There's a few new faces in the game. A real estate man from Chesterbrook. I've got him down for twelve. And a wildman from downstate, a dairyman. He's in for twenty-two thousand if he's in for a quarter." Lindsay closed the notebook with a snap. "And then there's Austin Schofield."

"Austin Schofield? The Judge's nephew?" Conway's tone was incredulous.

"You know any other Austin Schofields?" Lindsay asked with burlesque solemnity.

"Let's have it, Ted."

"I've got him down for nine."

"Nine? Nine thousand?" Conway's voice thickened with vehemence. "You're crazy. That kid never had nine hundred, of his own, in his damn life."

"Nevertheless." Lindsay tapped the notebook, "Chapter and verse. Nine thousand."

"Who let him in the damn game, Ted? A kid like that in with you pirates — "

"Who comes to the game with better qualifications?" Lindsay interrupted. "The first night he showed Bart and Doc and a couple more shook his hand and made him welcome. The game's been played practically every Tuesday night for the past twenty-five years, come drought or blizzard. His father played in the game. Until the Judge dropped out a couple years ago, it wasn't very often there wasn't a Schofield sitting in the game."

"But a Schofield who knew what he was doing!" Conway said impatiently. "That kind of money means the game's gotten out of hand. I can remember when if a man threw a check into a pot everyone there knew how much it overdrawn him." Lindsay nodded in agreement, smiling faintly. "I'm going to put a stop to this nonsense. Does the Judge know?"

"If no one told you, who do you think told him? But how do you think you're going to stop it?"

"If I have to, by padlocking Bart Chisom's warehouse."

"Bart Chisom draws a little water in this town, Joe. The game in his warehouse is an institution."

"Can the institution stand the echoes and feedback from a half-wired kid dropping nine thousand stolen dollars?"

"Stolen? That's a harsh word."

"You think he dug it out of the ground? You know he's been clerking in the Judge's office this summer. He must have —" A balled fist slammed down on the desk with enough force that a heavy paper-weight jumped. "Why didn't you come to me before?"

"That's not the question I thought you'd ask me, Joey." Lindsay said it softly. "I realize you're a little touchy now where the name Schofield is concerned, but I really expected you'd ask me why I came now."

Silence built up between them for 60 seconds before Conway spoke again. "There's a big winner? One big winner?"

"There's the bright young detective at work again. There's a big winner. Fifty-one thousand. Charlie. Charlie Ballou."

"That bushelfoot won that kind of money?"

Lindsay frowned. "I'm in the somewhat painful process of revising my previous estimate of ol' bushelfoot Charlie."

"You mean you think he's doing something?"

"No." Lindsay said it slowly. "I don't think he's doing anything because I've been watching him. It seemed like a bad joke at first, as poor a poker player as Charlie winning so consistently. Still, when the money tilts steadily in one direction, you tend to put the glass on it."

Lindsay hitched forward on the edge of his chair. "I've been paying more attention lately to his game than I have my own. It's almost uncanny the way he pours on the coal when he's top hand. Last week I kept track: all night long he never called on a hand he won. The losers called him. That's confidence. Or something."

"He's back-reading the cards?"

"If he is, I'd like to know how. I've taken home two dozen decks out of the game, and I've tested them with calipers, ultraviolet light, acid, even for transparencies. If the cards are marked, it's quite a job."

"Fifty-one thousand would buy quite a job."

"The cards aren't marked, Joe."

"So how's he doing it?"

"I'll be glad to let you know when I find out."

"But you're sure he's doing it?"

"He's got to be."

Conway leaned back in his chair. "I may be a little late, but I'll be at

the game tonight."

"Don't tell me ol' Sherlock discovered the method that quick?"

"No. I'll play it by ear: See you tonight."

TED LINDSAY STRUGGLED FOR A MOMENT AGAINST THE dismissal; then rose and turned toward the door. Conway's glance, following him, rested for a moment on the reversed black lettering on which Lindsay had commented so jibingly: Lieutenant Joseph Conway. It was a long way removed from Big Joe Conway. A long, hard way.

He locked his desk and left the office. He slid under the wheel of his car in the police parking lot and drove 20 miles to the nearest large town, Bloomington. He parked at the rear entrance of the Ellis Hotel. He rode the elevator up to the fourth floor and knocked on the door of Room 417.

"Who is it?" a muffled voice asked.

"Conway." He looked hard at the wiry, darkskinned man who opened the door. "Even over here it's not a good idea for you and Charlie to be seen together, Max."

"Nobody's seen us together," Charlie Ballou said from the bed where he was stretched out in stockingfeet. "I just got tired of sitting here popping my bubblegum and asked Max up for a drink. What's yours?"

"Some other time."

"Business?" Ballou sat up on the edge of the bed. He was a short, pudgy man with a round, cheerful face and thinning hair. He glanced toward Max Hawkins huddled over a complicated game of solitaire on the coffee table while his delicate-looking hands idly rifled another deck of cards. "Trouble?" Ballou asked when Conway said nothing.

"A beef about the game?"

"Ted Lindsay's watching you. He thinks you're doing things."

"Just me he's watching? Not Max?"

"Not Max."

"Anything specific?" Ballou asked.

"He noticed the way you ride hell out of your winning hands. He's got an adding machine for a mind. Don't underestimate him."

"Just so he doesn't notice who's dealing eighty percent of those winning hands — " Ballou looked at Max at the coffee table. "Nothing fatal, I'd say. Maybe I've been a little careless. We'll throw Lindsay a few bones for a month, Max. Nothing's bothering him that a couple of winning nights won't make him forget." Ballou nodded at Conway. "That's the kind of information that makes your weekly envelope a

good investment, young fella."

"There's more, Charlie."

"Like what?"

"Like Austin Schofield."

Ballou's fat lips pursed comically. "Mama's boy?"

"Austin's off-limits, Charlie."

"Now just how do you figure that, Lieutenant?" Charlie Ballou sounded genuinely curious.

"Austin Schofield is Judge Schofield's nephew, and I happen to be marrying Judge Schofield's daughter. The Judge has done a lot for me, and my plans include his doing a lot more. You've hooked the kid for fifteen grand."

"That sounds a little steep." Ballou looked again toward Max who shrugged noncommittally. "So I wouldn't argue about a few dollars. Why are you bringing it up?"

"Don't go stupid on me, Charlie. I just told you. And I'll take the fifteen thousand."

"I must really have my stupid suit on today. Why?"

"It's stolen money."

"I have no trouble spending it." Charlie Ballou looked at Max for appreciation of his wit. Max was eyeing Conway speculatively.

"I'll take it," Conway repeated.

"You'll take it." Ballou's tone was expressionless. "Just like that, you'll take it."

"Not like that. Like this." Ballou retreated an instinctive half-step at the swift appearance of the .38 Police Special from Conway's shoulder holster. "If necessary." The weapon hovered equidistant between Ballou and Max Hawkins. "I know about your sleeve derringer, Max. Don't get careless."

Ballou strove to sound amused. "You can't stand that kind of noise any more than we can, Conway. Relax, you're among friends. What makes you so hairy?"

"I played that record for you. Just hand me fifteen thousand dollars."

"So you can play big shot with the Judge? I'm afraid not." Ballou said it mildly. "Your position's a little weak, Lieutenant. You had me bring Max into the game and you turned us loose in return for three hundred bucks in a plain white envelope every Wednesday morning. I bought the deal with no fences around anyone. It goes as it lays."

"You're right about the suit you're wearing, Charlie. Circumstances alter cases."

"Not with me, they don't."

Conway took two quick steps forward, reversing the gun in his hand. Ballou flinched, but not quickly enough. The gun butt sank three-quarters of an inch deep in the muscle of his right forearm. Ballou yelled and fell over on the bed, whitefaced. He stared up in panic at Conway who bent down over him, then straightened up to watch the motionless Max.

"I told you this was important to me, Charlie," Conway said quietly. "Let me tell you how important, and I'm only going to tell you once. You make your living with that foolish-looking middle-aged child's face of yours. You keep standing me off and I'm going to work you over with this gun butt until you haven't a face left. Unless you get me fifteen thousand dollars, and I mean right now."

"Top right — bureau drawer!" Ballou managed to get out. He watched Conway walk to the bureau, placing his feet as carefully as a ballet dancer. Conway removed a bulging brown envelope from the top drawer, then tossed it on the coffee table in front of Max, disrupting the solitaire game. "Count. Fast."

Hawkins' slim fingers flashed through the bills. Silently he pushed a third of the stack across the table. Ballou was sitting up on the bed again, holding his arm, watching Conway as the big man stuffed the bulky sheaf of money into his inside jacket pocket. Ballou's voice was hoarse although he tried to sound jovial. "You play rough, kid."

"I don't play, Charlie."

Ballou tried to smile. "You sold me. Our deal still go on the game?"

"Why not? I'll see young Schofield's not there to tempt you."

"Business is business, eh?" Ballou's attempt at a smile was more of a success, but he winced when he tried to move his arm. "I still don't see why you're pawing the ground."

"You're not *that* stupid, Charlie. You knew who the kid was, and you knew my connections. You just didn't give a damn. Think it over the next time you feel like gambling with my prospects."

He walked backward to the door.

Neither Charlie nor Max changed position.

BACK IN HIS CAR, CONWAY SEPARATED NINE THOUSAND AND put it into his breast pocket again. The remainder he placed in the glove compartment. He shook his head as he drove away. Two years ago it had been a good idea to set up those two upstairs in the game, but two years ago he hadn't known he could marry Ann Schofield. The pair represented a hazard now, possibly even a blackmail threat.

He drove back to town and stopped at Chisolm's Hay & Grain Company. The front was dark, but he rapped on the glass until old

Bart's bald head appeared behind it. "Afraid you was a customer, Joe," the old man told Conway as he stood aside to let him in. He led the way to the rear of the dusty-smelling store, a wide-set, slow-moving man.

Conway sat down in the chair Bart Chisolm pulled out for him and looked around the tiny office littered with dishes of seed samples and half-empty grain bags. His host seated himself ponderously in front of his roll-top desk, settled a battered pair of spectacles on his high-bridged nose, and looked at Conway over the top of them. "Social visit, Joe?"

"No. I hear the poker game's gone a little frantic."

Chisolm smiled, displaying yellowed, snaggled teeth. "Boys will be boys. Been six, eight weeks since I sat in myself. Got a little too rich for my tired old blood. I've had it in mind to drop around an' talk it over with Dave, but you know how it is, you keep puttin' it off. Sometimes — "

"Talk it over with Dave Corbin? Why?"

"You young fellas tend to think nothin' ever happened in this world 'less it happened to you personal. Now I mind the time fourteen-fifteen years ago the reg'lars in the game was bein' crowded out by a passel of highrollers from all around this end of the state. I talked it over with Dave Corbin then. He raided the game."

"RAIDED it!"

"Before your time in it, I guess. Just seemed to happen, somehow, that the night Dave broke in upstairs warn't no one in the game *but* highrollers. All the locals was to home beatin' their wives, I reckon. Dave took 'em all in, charged 'em with bein' present, fined 'em fifty dollars apiece, an' turned 'em loose. Broke up the game, it did. Couple of months later a few of us reg'lars started it up again."

Thank you, Bart, Joe Conway thought. It makes it so simple. So beautifully simple. He cleared his throat. "I have a feeling you're going to be raided tonight, Bart."

The old man nodded solemnly. "Clear the air a mite, I shouldn't wonder. I'll make a few phone calls."

"Don't call Ted Lindsay," Conway said quickly. "He'll make it look natural, and I'll see he gets away in the scuffle." He should have a local witness present when he killed Charlie and Max, Conway thought. Ted Lindsay would do nicely.

He drove home in the twilight's heat, showered, and changed. The shoulder holster's bulge under his tailored white linen suit was scarcely noticeable. He hurried outside to his car again. He was late.

JUDGE SCHOFIELD WAS SITTING ON HIS WIDE VERANDA when Conway drove up. His fragile figure was dwarfed by his big chair. Conway never headed his car into the spacious grounds without thinking that one day soon all this would be Ann's, and what was Ann's would be his.

The judge raised the glass in his hand as Conway ascended the steps. Under the mane of white hair Judge Schofield's seamed, parchmentened face had a yellowing look. "Evenin', Joe. Join me?"

"Thanks. If you have a moment after dinner, sir — ?"

"Surely. Don't let me forget. I tend to these days."

Dinner was a testament to the judge's taste no less than his pocket-book, Conway thought. Ann sat at his right, complaisantly agreeable in her absentminded way. Not for the first time, Conway wondered what really went on inside that pale, cool-looking envelope. He had a feeling she might qualify as that *rara avis*, a truly passionless woman. Not that it mattered. He had a quiet little arrangement a few miles away that was anything but passionless, and Ann or no Ann, Conway saw no necessity for disturbing it. Before or after his marriage, for that matter.

He accepted one of the judge's slim panatellas in the library afterward. When the judge had stiffjointedly lowered himself into his wing chair, Conway handed him \$9000 of Charlie Ballou's money, plus a fast rundown. Judge Schofield listened impassively, but his lined features were drawn and tired-looking before Conway finished.

"I appreciate this, Joe," he said finally. "Evidently it's not only the cuckolded husband who's the last to know. The boy has the combination to the office safe, of course — " He tapped the sheaf of bills thoughtfully on the arm of his chair. "How the devil did you manage to recover this?"

"Let's say I found out which way to lean, sir."

"Evidently," the judge said drily. "It's not the first time you've impressed me with the force and vigor with which you attack a problem. Austin is a little — unstable. My brother — " he exhaled a thin cloud of light blue smoke impatiently. "Lame ducks. The world is full of lame ducks. I'll have a talk with you presently about Austin. Not tonight."

"We'll housebreak him, Judge."

"We'll do exactly that." The lined face was unsmiling. "You're a strong shoulder, Joe. Lately I seem to need one."

"I'm speaking downtown tonight, sir, so if you'll excuse me — ?"

The judge nodded. Conway said his goodnight to Ann at the coffee table on the veranda. Unquestioningly she held up her face for his

goodnight kiss. Cool. Cool and untouched. Unemotional? He still couldn't decide. But some day he knew he would make a forceful impression upon this girl-stranger to whom he was engaged, and she would cease this business of looking right through him.

HE STOPPED AT DEPUTY JIM BROWNING'S ON HIS WAY DOWNTOWN, walking around to the rear of the house. Browning himself answered the knock upon the kitchen door, his lean face questioning. "Have to roust you out a little later tonight, Jim," Conway said.

Browning nodded. "Someone cookin' a little mash? Will I need boots?"

"No boots. It's in town. We're raiding the poker game."

Browning's head went back as though he'd been struck. "The poker game? Well, now, Joe — "

"Dave will call you, Jim," Conway said, secretly amused. Browning was Dave Corbin's man, and he needed Dave's man to testify afterward what happened to Charlie and Max.

He drove to Dave Corbin's. The chief and his wife were seated on their front porch in the late dusk that was nearly darkness. Doris Corbin knowingly excused herself after a moment so the men could talk. The weatherbeaten Corbin listened carefully to Conway's account, a hand absently rubbing his gray-bristled jawline.

"Shame, in a way," Corbin said when Conway completed his tale. "But a little coolin' off period 'll be no bad thing all around. Damn game seems to run in cycles. You say Bart's takin' care of everything?"

"Yes. I'll take Jim with me. I just came from there. He's a little nervous. I told him you'd call him."

Corbin smiled. "I'll call him. Jim's a good man. You need me for anything?"

"Just to play magistrate afterward."

"I'll hunt up my gavel an' blow the dust off it."

All cleared with Dave Corbin, Conway thought on his way to the Boys' Club. Keep the old man posted, so that when the push finally came he'd never suspect from which direction. Or suspect it too late. Dave Corbin was much more nearly ready to retire than he knew.

Conway made his speech at nine-thirty. He had time afterward for a private drink with First Selectman Mike Winn in the locker room. He drove back to Jim Browning's home and pulled into the driveway. The kitchen light went out at the sound of his tires on the gravel. Browning crossed the damp grass from his back door and slid into the passenger's seat.

"Dave called me," he said in an embarrassed mumble. "I kinda thought when you mentioned it you might be playin' a little politics or —"

"Ted Lindsay's in the game for bait," Conway cut him off. "See to it that he gets away. We'll take in the rest."

He could see it all clearly. He'd send them all downstairs one at a time until only Charlie and Max were left. Those two would be carried down, and there would be no one to deny the raiding officer's version of what had happened.

Conway parked the car in the shadows at the rear of the large warehouse.

TED LINDSAY WATCHED GLUMLY AS CHARLIE BALLOU RAKED in a large pot. Ted had won the hand before, but there hadn't been nearly as much cash in it. How in the hell could as poor a poker player as ol' Charlie win so consistently? It was about to destroy Lindsay's faith in the law of averages.

"All right, nobody moves!"

Heads, arms, and bodies froze grotesquely around the green baize of the table top at the harsh command. Ted Lindsay stared blankly at a white-suited Joe Conway who was confronting them with a drawn gun. "What the hell — ?" Lindsay heard himself say in a disbelieving tone.

Another voice overrode his. "Stickup!" someone barked forcefully from the other side of the table.

Lindsay ducked instinctively when the man on his right, the down-state dairyman, moved abruptly. Lindsay's ears erupted with the room-contained explosion of a pistol shot. He thought Conway had fired at the dairyman's movement until he saw Conway stagger backward with a red mushroom blossoming upon the lapels of his white suit. The big man's forward recoil dropped him to his knees, from which he pitched forward onto his face.

"Holy Toledo!" Lindsay shouted, awestruck. He found himself halfway to his feet. "That's a cop you just killed!"

"Cop?" the dairyman echoed. His gun was still leveled at the prostrate Conway. "He said — " he pointed " — stickup!"

The dairyman was pointing at Charlie Ballou who, Ted Lindsay noted with one corner of his mind, had the same self-satisfied smirk on his face that he did after winning the best pot of the night.

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A suspense-
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She was leaving him, he was sure of it. He'd gotten mad and hit her, first time he'd done that since they were married. Bad thing. The life was getting to him, bringing out things he'd never known were there!

Long Haul

by STEVE RASNIC TEM

MANNING SLAPPED THE BACK OF HIS NECK TO KEEP AWAKE. He knew he must have been doing that a lot the past few hours; his neck and shoulder muscles were numb from it. But he was so tired he'd lost track; he had no idea when his skin had stopped even stinging when he slapped it.

He pushed at the steering wheel, stretched his legs and lifted himself off the seat. Then he was fighting the wheel again, the semi weaving and shaking. How long had he been going downhill? It seemed like hours. His hand was sore from working the trailer brake lever. And the view was all the same: high blood-red clay bank on his left, a drop off into dark trees on his right, narrow cracked pavement and gravel under him. And each time he looked out front to where the illumination from the headlights ended, there was just more road, more dark clay bank, more trees filling up the valley off to his right like pushed-together thunderheads. He'd always preferred driving at night — not so many cars. But not this night.

The weight of the load — What was it? Electric motors tonight? Yeah . . . heavy suckers — pushed the truck hard going downhill. Cutting down its speed was like trying to stop a wild horse.

... I don't remember loving you . . .

What was that? KBRQ on the radio. Denver. He'd forgotten it was on.

... It's rainin' again . . .

Damn, that was loud. How could he have had it on so loud and still not noticed it?

... keep these big wheels spinnin' . . .

His feet were cold again. As if something with cold teeth were biting them. But his face was hot and sweaty. A sick sweat . . . he must be running a fever. He'd only had a sweat like that once, when he was fifteen, and his mama had sat up with him all night. It had felt like hot petroleum jelly was running down his face, but somehow although the sweat was hot, and made his face hot, it felt like the skin where the sweat tracks were was bitter cold . . . cold as death.

The heater hadn't been checked back at the terminal. There'd seemed no need; it didn't get that cold in Colorado . . . yeah, he was in Colorado . . . this time of year.

Except maybe in this valley, on this wrong turn. Going downhill where it was getting colder all the time.

... I keep on callin' . . . her name . . .

Charlotte used to say that someday he'd take a wrong turn and wind up in some ditch with his wheels spinning, the cab smoking, and his head all caved in like a rotten melon.

... if I ain't bein' clear, darlin' . . .

But not this trip, Charlotte, honey. No way. Actually, Manning thought his wife might not mind him getting killed this trip out. She'd said . . . what? Yeah . . . that he'd been dead to her for years. She was fed up with him being gone all the time. Maybe she'd run off with the

newspaper boy. He chuckled and it sounded hollow and strange to him inside the cab.

Him getting killed. That would settle things between him and Charlotte for good.

... tryin' not to love you, baby . . . is hard to do . . .

He put his fist into the heater. Again and again. Finally his fingers were warm again. Something wet was running over his hand, heating it up, soaking into his sleeve.

He'd been hauling melons tonight. No . . . no, motors. Electric motors. Electric melons broken into crescent-moon shapes, smiling neon smiles. Melon smiles scattered all over the road, bustin' out of the trailer and rollin' off into the dark. Escaping. He laughed out loud.

... how can my arms feel so empty . . .

He'd been hauling electric motors, and rolling out of Colorado Springs on Colorado Highway 115, on his way to Canon City, there'd been this detour in the dark . . . dark as oil then . . . there'd been a detour down this . . .

No . . . he slapped the back of his neck again. The road had been hard to see; the headlights hurt his eyes. No, it had been another truck, that oil dark filling up all of a sudden with light and noise, heavy tires and a roaring engine.

... time is just passin' through . . .

And then suddenly he'd been barreling down this narrow road here, down this canyon, or valley, on this road that seemed to go down forever and wasn't even on his map.

Oh, Charlotte would laugh at him for this one. They'd share a beer and a laugh over this one.

Suddenly Manning was missing his wife, missing her bad. He usually didn't admit that to himself. They fought every time he was home, but he'd known for a long time it was only because she'd missed him so bad and hated so bad his being gone, and he was always irritable while he was home because he missed her so bad and was nervous about them getting along for that short time. And of course, they never did. He always just made it worse with the worryin'.

He flipped her picture over on the dashboard so that he could look at

her face. He didn't do that often; it usually made him feel too bad. She was beautiful: a little gray in the temples of that dark brown hair, just the way he liked it. Showing her age that way, and yet she had the same body she had when he married her.

Sometimes it felt like while he was out driving the roads getting old, time was standing still for her waiting at home. She'd be looking just the same way every time he got back into town.

He stared down at her photograph. Just like that picture never changed.

... closer to you . . . dreamin' of your embrace . . .

He should have rested more back at that last stop. He'd had a few drinks . . . shouldn't do that, some bastard might pass the word along. A few miles before he'd spent an hour clearing dirt out of a fuel filter, so he'd really needed a taste. He should have stayed and rested awhile but somebody — he couldn't remember who — had noticed he was hauling poultry and the man'd called him a Chicken Choker.

But no, he was hauling melons tonight . . . motors . . .

... I still recall the mornin' that I met you . . .

He hit the back of his neck again, pounding at something bothering him there. Something that had gotten down under his skin. The CB was crackling, sputtering to life.

... Break 19, this is . . . we got us a Willy Weaver . . .

So there was a drunk out tonight. Manning couldn't get the rest of it, hoped the drunk wasn't on his narrow stretch of road. His stomach was dropping out of his pants. The incline steeper by the minute, and no relief in sight. He could barely hold the semi back.

... there's a chill in my bones . . .

Charlotte was leaving him; he was pretty sure of that. She was leaving him tonight. Hadn't they talked about that before he left? Yeah they had . . . he'd gotten damned mad . . . hit her . . . first time he'd hit her since they'd been married. Bad thing . . . this life was getting to him, bringing out things in him he'd never known were there.

... there's a face in the dark . . . and it tore us apart . . .

The road seemed to drop out from under him again, the clay bank leaning over on him, the dark trees heaving by the passenger window. The 220 horses roared in his ears, air brakes screaming.

... that you, Willy? . . .

He slapped at the CB. It was a woman's voice. A voice just like Charlotte's. "Yeah!" he screamed. But just pops and snaps answered him from the CB. Then . . .

... Willy Manning? . . .

The voice was cold, cold as those teeth biting into his feet. It froze him at the wheel, his thick wrists and heavy forearms locked rigid.

The voice on the CB was laughing, hollow-like. But it didn't sound like it was from another truck at all. It sounded like it was inside his right ear, laughing there, putting ice in his brain.

The wind was whistling, then roaring around the cab, the semi rocking back and forth as it sailed down the incline.

Something else was screaming. Maybe it was him. There was a crashing and a banging coming from the trailer, as if everything had torn loose in there.

... you got all the sunshine I'll ever need . . .

He never should have hit her, but she was leaving him. She was packing up everything, and he told her she couldn't have nothing. He never should have had those drinks. He told her he'd take it all with him first, including her.

He should have been more careful making that turn. He should have seen that other truck sooner. But it was so dark out tonight . . . oil dark.

... I got the memories . . .

The truck swung into a wide circle of gravel. Impossibly, it stopped, as if by itself, right where the road started downhill again. Without thinking Manning jumped out and went to the back of the truck. All twenty-two running lights seemed to be pulsing a dull red. The seal was still in place.

What was it he was hauling tonight? Melons, motors, lumber, Texas grapefruit, water heaters, farm machinery, chickens? He couldn't remember, and he knew that somehow he'd lost the waybill a long time back.

When he stepped up on the dock bumper and opened the narrow double doors he found himself staring into oil dark, deep dark. Then his eyes adjusted. The trailer was full of furniture from his house, all laid out as if he were living there. And there was more stuff in the back, all covered with tarp.

... there's a chill in my bones . . .

He'd told her he'd take it all. He'd told her he wouldn't let her leave him. Why, his whole life was in this truck.

Something was stirring under the tarp at the back of the truck, struggling, moving around his furniture. But he wasn't going in there to see what it was. Not just yet.

... there's a face in the dark . . .

He crawled back into the cab. He looked down to where the road started again, dropping down as if forever, falling away into the biggest blackness he'd ever seen. The road brought out a lot of different things in a man. But he had no time to think about it. It had been a long haul.

And he knew he had a long haul yet to go. ●

*STEVE RASNIC TEM (*Long Haul*):*

I'm a freelance living in Denver. In the last 3½ years I've sold over 50 short stories, most of them fantasy and horror, to such publications as The Twilight Zone Magazine, Fantasy Book, Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine, the revived Weird Tales, the Playboy paperback anthologies Horrors and Terrors, and regular appearances in the Doubleday anthology series Shadows and Chrysalis, etc.

Things at school had gone from bad to worse. The vandalism was disconcerting enough. But now there had been a murder!

Schooldays

by MARGUERITE H. EDMONDS

"THIS IS MISS SWEENEY WHO WILL BE TEACHING ONE OF THE fifth grades," said the principal. A tall attractive woman nodded to the rest of us sitting around her.

I gazed at her in surprise. Heidi Sweeney had been in the same class with me in fourth grade. It had been she who gasped in "shock" when I failed math tests and the teacher had reprimanded me. It was Heidi who encircled herself with friends to whom she distributed candy on Fridays. I seldom was among the favored who shared this fourth-grade ambrosia, and when I brought candy once, I remember so well that Heidi begged for some, promising to pay me back — a promise she never kept.

Although she looked directly at me, she appeared not to recognize me; I've changed a great deal since grammar school. It's been forty years, after all; my hair is iron gray, and even my name has changed. It's strange that she still retained the "Shirley Temple" curls she was so proud of.

When the faculty meeting ended, I went with my friends back to the junior high section of the building. Preparing for the next day's opening of school, I worked late. The west wing of the school where the junior high rooms are located is isolated from lower grade rooms, so I seldom see those teachers. This afternoon, I was so late that my usual exit door was already locked. I back-tracked on the lower level to find an unlocked door. Toward the center of the building, I passed an open door beside which hung a sign, "Miss Sweeney, Grade Five." Obviously the newcomer hadn't heard the rule about locking doors when you leave the room. She had her bulletin boards all decorated, her desk in order, and plan book open for use.

The main door to the building was unlocked. A cloud darkened the parking lot, and I hurried lest rain begin before I got home. My evening was spent planning lesson units for the months to come. I retired early; it had been a busy day.

I ARRIVED AT SCHOOL AT 8:15 THE NEXT MORNING. A POLICE car was just leaving the parking lot.

"What happened?" I asked Mr. Sheldon, the custodian, who stood by the door.

"Kids wrecked the new teacher's room. Poured white paint all over the desk and threw it on the bulletin boards. Luckily it was water soluble poster paint — no real damage to the room. I guess she'll have to get new pictures and such though."

"Only her room?" I asked. He nodded. "That's a relief," I told him and went to check in at the office.

School opened. The children slipped easily into routines. Life went along pleasantly until the following Tuesday when I caught up on my work and decided to spend my preparation period in the faculty room. Lillian Cranmer was there; Jean Bulson and Paul Frederick came in shortly after me. Paul claimed the lounge chair with the big leather ottoman while Jean and Lillian collapsed on the soft, foam-stuffed couch they enjoy so much. I sat in the straight-backed chair which helps my back. Jean was telling an amusing story about a seventh grader's excuses for lack of homework when Heidi Sweeney strolled in. Immediately, all talk centered on her.

"How's everything going?" asked Lillian.

"Oh, I'm catching up. Mr. Stanton gave me new materials right away. He's such a nice principal!" Heidi gushed.

"Now if you need any more help, remember I'm always available," Paul offered. Evidently he had already been of service to her.

"How kind of you!" she fluttered her eye lashes in his direction. Overcome by a feeling of having lived through this before, I left. I hoped she didn't plan to spend all of her free time in the faculty room.

My afternoon classes went smoothly except for one incident as eighth period began when an overgrown oaf started a fight with one of the nicer boys in the class. I managed to separate them and pushed the oaf out the door, sending him to the office. If there is one thing that upsets me, it's having someone disrupt my life like that. I need an orderly, controlled atmosphere. I was on edge for the rest of the period. Luckily, I had permission to leave early for a meeting at another school; I was able to leave the frustrations of the afternoon behind and drive along the parkway which was bordered by colorful maples. That's one of the pleasures of being on a school committee.

I DIDN'T GO TO THE FACULTY ROOM THE NEXT MORNING. I had a report to write, and besides, I couldn't face Heidi so early in the day should she be there. Lillian came in just before the student bell rang.

"Did you hear about Heidi's car?"

"Heidi? Heidi who?" I asked, thinking to myself that people were certainly becoming quite familiar around here.

"You know — Heidi Sweeney, the new teacher. Somebody slashed her tires yesterday."

"What kind of neighborhood does she live in?"

"No, no, not at home — here. When she went out after school, she found two tires on one side slashed. There must be a very disturbed kid around to do that!"

"Maybe we shouldn't drive our cars to school — take a bus; a car is a pretty expensive item to have vandalized."

"Oh, her comprehensive insurance covers it, but it's not much fun. Paul gave her a ride home. I don't know how she got here this morning."

"I'm sure she found someone to drive her," I said. "Well, I haven't checked in at the office yet; I'd better step along. The children are coming in." I hurried down the hall.

I worked hard that day. The children had individualized assignments. I went from student to student, encouraging, correcting, giving new ideas. By three o'clock my back throbbed. However, it had been a satisfying day for me and for my students.

As I locked my door, Lillian and Jean came along.

"We're going up to the mall," Jean said. "Want to come along?"

"No, my back is aching. I'm going straight home."

The faculty room door opened and Heidi came out.

"Oh, Mrs. Rogers, I'm so glad I caught you! Could you give me a ride? I understand you live on Elm Street. The gas station at Elm and James is putting my new tires on. I'd like to pick the car up now."

What could I say? I had just told my friends that I was going right home. I agreed, and she followed me to my car.

THE RIDE DOWN TAKES ABOUT TEN MINUTES. TODAY IT WAS ten minutes of parrying Heidi's questions.

"Have you taught here long, Mrs. Rogers?"

"About ten years."

"Where were you before?"

"I was wondering the same about you, Miss Sweeney. Where did you teach last?" I countered.

"I was at Remsen Central."

"Why did you leave?"

"The usual — fewer students, fewer teachers needed." We turned right on red and Heidi continued, "Have you always lived in Utica?"

"I have a country home up north," I fended. "Do you have a family?"

"Just my father," she answered. "Did you attend local . . ."

"The station is just down this block," I interrupted. I really didn't want to revive old memories.

"It was certainly nice of you to give me a ride. I used to live near here as a child."

I said nothing, but turned on my signal for the turn into the gas station. I stopped near the doors and she got out.

"Do you live near here?" she asked. "Maybe we could go out for a bite to eat after I get my car."

"Not tonight," I answered quickly. "I'm exhausted. Thanks anyway." I shifted to drive and left. That's all I needed! Revival of that terrible relationship would ruin my pleasant life. I had worked hard to build an interesting, orderly life.

IN THE FOLLOWING DAYS THINGS WERE WORSE IN SCHOOL. My friends turned smilingly to Heidi whenever she appeared. Paul crinkled his eyes in appreciation when she flounced those dark curls into the faculty room. My childhood had not been happy; I didn't want that to happen to my adult life. Such thoughts kept depressing me through the week and into the weekend. On Monday when I saw her go into the faculty room, I just resigned myself to staying in my room.

What a terrible thing loneliness is! Of course, I had the children

around me, but the relationship between adult and child was not what I needed. I had to be satisfied with light talk in the hall between classes.

At the end of the day, knowing I would have a lonely evening at home, I closed up my room as soon as the students left so that I could spend the last half hour with friends; I couldn't stand solitariness any longer.

Paul was sitting in his favorite chair. Lillian came in directly behind us.

"Haven't seen you all day," he grinned at me. "You shouldn't work so hard. You can't retire for years."

Lillian and I laughed and sat down. Jean and two special education teachers came in. Jean began to tell me about a class she was taking in astrology that she thought I'd like.

Then Heidi walked in. "Hi, nice people," she beamed. "What's everyone doing tonight? Anything interesting?"

Paul said, "Jean was telling us about a course she's taking in astrology."

"Oh, how fascinating!" Heidi bubbled. "I'd love to go. Where is it? Could I go with you?"

"It's at U.C. and it's open to everyone. The cost is \$32," Jean told her.

"That's not bad. Is it tonight? Could I go with you?" she asked again.

"I guess so," Jean answered. "Are you coming too, Monica?

She turned to me, obviously unsure of how to manage the situation. I certainly wasn't going anywhere with Heidi Sweeney, so I got up to leave.

"Sorry," I lied. "I have a friend coming for supper."

WHEN I FINALLY DID GET HOME THAT DAY, IT WAS FIVE o'clock and I was exhausted. There was something about the tension Heidi created in me that left me limp. I called a nearby Chinese restaurant and had supper delivered. Then I took a shower and lay in bed watching TV until I fell asleep.

The next morning when I awakened at six as usual, I still felt exhausted. I could not possibly have gone to school. I called for a substitute and crawled back into my warm bed.

Near ten, the doorbell rang. I really didn't want to answer it, but it kept ringing insistently. I put on my red velvet robe and opened the door. A short, bald man in a dark suit showed me an I.D. for the Utica police.

"Mrs. Rogers?" May I come in and ask you a few questions?"

What do you say to a policeman? I told him I was ill, but that was no deterrent. In the livingroom he stood although I invited him to sit.

"When you left the faculty room yesterday afternoon, exactly where did you go?

"I went to the parking lot. Why? What's happened? Has there been more vandalism?"

"I guess you might say that. Miss Sweeney was found dead in the coatroom of her classroom." He watched my face as he said it. I almost fainted, but I'm sure I put on a good front. He continued, "I'd like to know the exact path you followed to get to the parking lot."

"I went right from my room out the nearest exit, the west door."

"I understood you left your room early."

"Well, I did, but the faculty room is just next door, so it's as if I went from my room."

"I understood you left the faculty room early."

"I really didn't want the principal to know I'd slipped out early . . . I wasn't feeling well, and I wasn't up to asking for permission."

"Mrs. Rogers, please get dressed and come to the school with me," It wasn't a request.

"I'm not feeling well; I called in ill."

"I'm sorry, but it has to be this way. Please get dressed."

I went to my bedroom and closed the door. I really felt ill. I dressed in the navy corduroy suit I had worn yesterday. My hair was a frazzled mess; my eyes looked as though I hadn't slept. I procrastinated as long as I could — until he knocked politely at the door.

I WANTED TO USE MY OWN CAR, BUT HE INSISTED UPON driving me, saying I looked too ill to drive; he promised to drive me back home later. At school he led me directly to the faculty room. There were three detectives talking to a group of teachers. School had been suspended for the day. I sat waiting for my turn. Several teachers commiserated with me; I guess I looked quite ill.

Actually I could have been questioned at home; the same questions were asked. No one had seen me leave, and my car had been gone from the parking lot, so I was under no suspicion. I was allowed to leave, so I went back to my room. Several children were loitering in the hall. As I reached my classroom door, Jimmy Fitzpatrick came up to me; Jimmy's a lively member of my homeroom.

"Hi, Mrs. Rogers! Can I come in the room?"

"I guess so." I was too ill to change his "can" to "may."

I unlocked the door. Jimmy chattered away about the murder.

I really didn't pay much attention to what he was saying until he repeated a question.

"Didn't you see anything when you were down there after school?"

"What are you talking about?"

"You know, when you left late last night. I came back about four-thirty to look through the lost and found box by the janitor's office and I saw you leaving. I called to you, but I guess you didn't hear me."

I had to be cautious. "Was the janitor with you? I must have looked like a daffy old lady!"

"Oh no," Jimmy grinned, "I didn't see anybody else. I guess he was upstairs somewhere."

"While you're here, Jim, could you help me straighten some of the boxes in the closet?" I asked, going toward the back of the room.

The closet runs the full width of the room across the back. Since the principal insists teachers be in the hall supervising passing students, those who enter the room often get into mischief in the closet. They hide each other's coats inside boxes of books, or shinny up inside the air vent to the next room. Once the teacher in room 28, next door, was quite upset when one of my boys came out in her closet. He thought it was funny; we felt it was dangerous, for entrapment within the walls would be terrifying, if not deadly.

"I showed Jimmy a box of books I wanted moved. "It's quite heavy," I said. "Do you think you can lift it?"

"Sure, Mrs. Rogers," he grinned, "I'm strong from carrying my newspapers."

He bent over to pick it up, and I slipped my corduroy suit belt around his neck. How he fought! I had to hold the belt with both hands while he kicked me and scratched my arms and face. His sturdy leather boots hurt dreadfully when he kicked. He pulled out a handful of my hair, but still I held on, twisting the belt as tightly as I could. I was sure I felt blood running down my face from his scratching. The pullover shirt I wore was stretched from his pulling. I held on until he finally went limp, and even then kept the belt tight for what seemed like several minutes more. I wanted to be sure he was dead, but I couldn't leave the belt tied around his neck as I had the window cord around Heidi's; I had been certain she would never revive.

I dragged him to the air vent opening; it's built into the wall as a fireplace is, except, of course, there is no hearth and the "chimney" is connected to the next room. I had never really looked inside before. There was not enough room for my shoulders, but a child would fit quite nicely. I had to find some way to keep his thin body from falling down where it could be seen.

I pushed a student chair in to hold him in place and then used the short window pole to pry him up further, leaving it propped under him while I pulled myself together and found something more dependable to leave holding his body in the vent.

Using the mirror in the girls' section of the closet, I found the scratches were not bleeding as I had feared; I covered the marks with make-up. I combed my hair, straightened my clothes, and went out into the classroom to look for a prop. So, I was not in the closet when the detective came into my room. I casually shut the closet and started toward the front of the room.

"Are you ready to go?" he asked. "I did promise to drive you home."

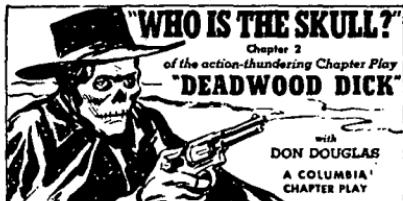
"Oh, that's not really necessary," I smiled, trying to appear calm. "I'm sure one of the other teachers will drive me home."

"Most of them have already gone. Let me get your coat," he said. He walked back toward the closet.

"Never mind; I'll get it!" Quickly, I opened the door to reach for my coat which hung to the left of the air vent, next to the door. A crash brought the detective running. I stood there aghast! Jimmy had fallen to the floor at the foot of the vent!

The detective rushed past me. He pulled the child to the clear space at the back of the room. Shouting to me to get help, he began resuscitation. I clutched my coat and left the room. Next door in the faculty room, I told the other policemen that help was needed in room twenty-seven.

Then I put on my coat and walked out of the building. I walked up the street, turned the corner and walked home. This is the only place left where pleasantness and order remain for me. The doorbell is ringing, but I'm not expecting any company. I don't have to answer it.





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A COLUMBIA CHAPTER PLAY

*She was seeing strange lights where no lights should be.
Was it ghosts — or worse?*

The Street With No Houses

by EDWARD D. HOCH

IT HAD BEEN MONTHS SINCE POLICEWOMAN NANCY TRENtino had seen Lisa Gold, her old classmate from City College, and she was looking forward to spending the Fourth of July weekend with her. Lisa was six months pregnant now, and having some problems. Her doctor had suggested she stay home while husband Phil flew to Atlanta on business, and Lisa had phoned Nancy at once.

"I'll go crazy being all alone in this house for the weekend," she said. "All our friends are on vacation and Phil won't be back till Monday. Come stay with me!"

It sounded good to Nancy, who had the weekend off anyway. "When will I come?"

"Let's see — the holiday is Saturday. Could you drive out Friday afternoon?"

Nancy consulted her work schedule. "My shift ends Friday morning. I could grab a few hours' sleep and be on the road by noon."

"Fine! I can't want to see you, Nancy!"

LISA AND PHIL GOLD LIVED IN A NEW COMMUNITY FAR OUT on Long Island, where the massive development of the Seventies had been slowed by the equally massive interest rates of the Eighties. Once off the expressway, Nancy passed several areas where the streets and sewer lines were already in place, waiting only for more favorable loan conditions so the houses could be built. The Golds lived near one of these streets without houses, in one of the last subdivisions to be completed before money became tight. Their house was a charming white colonial, with plenty of room for the family Lisa had always talked of raising.

"Nancy!" she cried, throwing her arms around her when she was barely out of the car. "It's so *good* to see you! I've been feeling trapped out here with Phil away. Do you have an overnight bag?"

"It's in the trunk. Tell me about yourself, Lisa. How are you feeling?"

Lisa patted the growing bulge below her stomach. "I'll tell you I've felt better in my life, but it's worth every minute of it. Phil's a dear. He hated to be away, but the law firm has a client in Atlanta who's contemplating a merger. It would have to be over the holiday!"

Nancy followed her inside, carrying the little suitcase. The house was as warm and comfortable as she remembered it from her single previous visit. "They still haven't built over in the next subdivision," she remarked.

Lisa nodded, leading the way to the spare bedroom. "They're waiting for the interest rates to come down."

"At least you can still see the woods out your back windows." Nancy laid her bag on the bed and gazed out the window at the distant landscape. "When those houses go up all you'll have is new neighbors."

"It's a half-mile away. I guess they won't bother us too much." She nervously lit a cigarette and changed the subject. "So how's crime in the big city these days?"

"Not much different from here, I suppose — only there's more of it. I collared a pusher on the midnight shift."

"Drugs! They even found some junior high kids with pot last week! Sometimes I wonder what kind of world Phil and I are bringing our baby into!"

THEY WENT BACK DOWNSTAIRS AND NANCY HELPED HER friend prepare a light supper for the two of them. "Are you and Phil happy living way out here at the edge of nowhere?" Nancy asked later, over coffee.

"Oh, I suppose so. I'm always happy when he's home. It's just that I couldn't face the holiday weekend alone. With the baby and all, I've been having some weird symptoms."

"Like what?"

Lisa laughed. "Like seeing ghosts."

"Really?"

"A couple of weeks ago something woke me in the night. I got up to go to the bathroom, and out the back window I thought I saw lights over in the distance, on the new street."

"Lights?"

"All up and down the street, Nancy, like the houses were all built and there were people living in them. I drove over the next day but of course there were no houses — nothing but the street leading up to the woods and stopping. A street to nowhere. They don't even have the light poles up yet."

"Maybe you were dreaming."

"That's what my doctor says!"

"I never heard of a new street being haunted, before there are even any houses on it," Nancy said, making light of it. "You know ghosts need hundred-year-old mansions."

AFTER SUPPER THEY REMINISCED ABOUT THEIR DAYS AT City College, interrupted now and then by the crackle of fireworks from somewhere down the street. The neighborhood youngsters were getting an early start. "I think I'm going to turn in early," Nancy finally decided. "I never did get that nap this morning. I had to appear in court instead."

"God, Nancy, I couldn't imagine being a policewoman!"

"You get used to the missed sleep. You get used to anything after a while, I guess."

In the morning breakfast was a delight. They lingered long over it, and it was after ten before Nancy spotted the flashing red lights over on the new street. "That looks like police cars," she said.

"It sure does!" Lisa glanced out the side window. "There's Ernie, our postman. Maybe he knows what's going on. "She opened the door and called to the balding man with the mail sack. "Anything for us today, Ernie?"

"Not a thing, Mrs. Gold. Sorry."

"What's going on over at the new street?"

"They found a dead body. Man got himself shot."

"My God! Who was it?"

"Nobody seems to know. A stranger, I guess." He continued on down the street and turned in at the next house.

"Can you imagine that?" Lisa asked, closing the door. "A killing, right here in the neighborhood! And you came out here to get away from crime!"

"There's no getting away from it," Nancy agreed. "Let's take a walk over there and see what's going on."

THEY CUT THROUGH THE BACK YARD AND WALKED ACROSS A large vacant lot overgrown with midsummer weeds. There were four police cars on the scene, plus an unmarked car and an ambulance. Nancy went up to a stocky middle-aged detective who seemed to be in charge. "Nancy Trentino from the city force," she said, showing her ID. "Can I be of any help?"

"Sergeant Gregger," he mumbled in reply. "You live around here?"

"I'm visiting a friend over on that next street."

He glanced at Lisa, noting her condition, and asked, "Either of you ladies hear anything during the night? Shots, maybe?"

"Nothing but fireworks."

"Yeah." He nodded sadly. "That would have covered the sound, all right."

Nancy caught a glimpse of the body as it was being zipped into a plastic bag. "He was shot?"

Gregger nodded. "Three times, up close. Looks like a gang killing to me. It certainly wasn't robbery. He's got a roll of fifties in his pocket."

"You think he was dumped here?"

"No, this is where he got it. You can tell by the blood."

"No identification?"

"Yeah. His name's Timothy Painter. Got a Florida driver's license, a pilot's license and a membership in the Miami Beach Yacht Club. I guess he got around on land, sea and air, but it didn't keep him alive." He watched the police photographer take a couple of final shots. "Now you know as much as I do. You can go back to the big city and tell them how we do things out in the sticks."

"Will you be around for a while?" Nancy asked.

"Young lady, I'll be around till I've talked to every single person in every one of those houses over there. That's what I get paid for."

Lisa and Nancy walked back across the vacant lot. "He wasn't awfully friendly," Lisa decided, "considering you're a policewoman and all."

"He's got his own problems without me butting in." But when they reached the house she said, "Come on, Lisa, let's go for a ride in my car."

"What are you up to, anyway."

"Just nosing around."

"Are you going to solve the murder?"

"I'm out of my jurisdiction. But there's something that bothers me."

"What's that?" She climbed into the front seat of Nancy's little car and they backed out of the driveway.

"Those lights you saw along the empty street, where there were no houses."

"It was probably a dream."

"Maybe, maybe not."

"What else could it have been?"

Nancy replied with another question. "How well do you know your neighbors?"

"Casually. They're mostly older than Phil and me, with kids in high school."

"I figured that."

"Nancy, stop talking in riddles!"

She spotted something and turned quickly down a side street. "The dead man had a pilot's license, Lisa. What awakened you a couple of weeks back was the sound of a small plane landing — or more likely taking off. They neede the lights to illuminate the landing strip."

"What landing strip?"

"The new street — the street with no houses. You mentioned all the dope in the schools. They were flying it in by night, landing on that street. they're probably supplying half of Long Island from here. The pilot must have wanted more money and he got himself shot. Whoever took the plane couldn't risk landing it with a dead body so they left him here."

"But — "

Nancy twisted the wheel sharply and her little car turned left into a driveway, cutting in front of the startled man on the sidewalk. Then she was out of the vehicle, tugging at the service revolver she always carried in her purse. "That's right, Ernie — stop right there!"

The postman dropped his bag and started to run, then halted at a sharp command from Nancy. "There aren't any mail deliveries on the Fouth of July, Ernie. Not unless you've got a mail sack full of narcotics to deliver to the neighborhood junkies. Let's go tell Gregger about the rest of your gang, and about that murder last night." ●



Sometimes it happened that way — the strangest people want to murder their wives!

The Customer

by JACK RITCHIE

HE CAME TO MY TABLE IN THE CORNER OF THE CLUB'S BAR and stared at me. "Are you James Garrison?"

I nodded.

Yes, in this city, this country club, I am known as James Garrison. Before I came here I had another name, and when I leave, I will take another still.

He hesitated. "Hendricks sent me."

Ah, I thought, another customer. And this time via a recommendation. Again I nodded.

He wanted to be absolutely sure that he was talking to the right person. "Did you do a little job for Hendricks about two months ago? In August?"

I am a cautious man. "Perhaps."

He decided that would have to do. "I've never met anybody like you before. Just how far can I trust you?"

"I have never failed a client . . . or gotten him into trouble."

He sat down. "Hendricks told me about you. He said I would find you here."

I HAVE BEEN A MEMBER OF THIS COUNTRY CLUB FOR ABOUT a year now. It is quite an exclusive organization. However with the aid of expertly forged credentials, I have been accepted as a member.

I spend a great many hours here. At this table. I find that the bar-rooms of country clubs are my best hunting grounds. People drink. Sometimes too much. They talk. They tell me things.

I listen sympathetically and when I find someone who is a potential customer, I cultivate him carefully.

I now studied the man before me. Typical, I thought. Middle-aged, gray-haired, a bit portly. A Kiwanis button in his left lapel. One does not see many Kiwanis buttons in a club of this kind.

He stared at his fingers for a few seconds. "It's my wife," he said. "We've been married about thirty years. I'd like to get a divorce, but the court would probably give her just about everything we own because she knows about" He stopped.

I smiled. "There's another woman?"

He shrugged. "Well, I'd like to get married again. Let's put it that way."

Yes, I thought, at that age they begin looking around. He's found someone else and probably she's twenty years younger than his wife.

He continued. "I'll be at a banquet Thursday evening. From seven-thirty to about eleven. A lot of people will be there who know me. It's stag, so my wife won't be with me. She'll be at home. That's when I want it done."

Yes, they all needed alibis.

He sighed. "A lot of times, I wanted to do it myself. But this is the better way. Hiring you to do it for me."

I agreed. Yes, much better. And profitable for me.

"Make it look like a break-in," he said. "She keeps some jewelry in the top drawer of her dresser in the bedroom."

"What method would you prefer?" I asked.

"Method?"

"Shall I shoot her? Stab her? Use a club?"

He thought about that. "Whatever you do best."

"There is the question of my fee," I said. "I am paid *before* I perform my services. Not after. And in cash, of course."

I had expected him to tell me that he would bring the money tomorrow, but he reached into his suitcoat pocket and brought out a

package. He put it on the table.

Then he handed me a slip of paper with an address on it. "I suppose I might as well give you my name?"

I smiled. "Of course. After all, you have just provided me with your address and I can learn the identity of your wife simply by reading the newspapers the next day."

He stood up. "The name is Walter Morgan. Lieutenant Walter Morgan."

I blinked. Lieutenant? "Navy man?" I asked hopefully. "Retired?"

Now he grinned. "No. Police department. And not retired."

I CLOSED MY EYES AND THEN QUICKLY REOPENED THEM. What actual *proof* did he have that I had ever killed anybody? My own words? Just what *had* I told him? I couldn't remember exactly.

Did he have some kind of a recording device on his person? And the microphone was in that damn Kiwanis button? Or had he gotten to my table when I was not here and bugged the entire area?

I tried to laugh. "See here, this is just a little private joke between Hendricks and me. A little practical joke we've put together to see how the club members react."

"I'm not a club member. And Hendricks wasn't joking."

"Then Hendricks is a liar," I said. "He can't prove a thing."

Lieutenant Morgan shook his head. "No, Hendricks wasn't lying. Or playing a joke. Not at a time like that."

I was confused. "Time like that? Time like what?"

"It was an automobile accident," Morgan said. "Yesterday evening. He was rushed to the hospital, but it was obvious even to him that he was dying and didn't have long. He decided to go to his maker with a clear conscience, so he sent for me. He remembered me because I was in charge of the investigation into the murder of his wife. Just before he died, he whispered the whole story in my ear."

Morgan shoved the package closer to me.

The package? Thank goodness I hadn't touched it. No one would find *my* fingerprints on that bit of evidence.

Morgan's grin widened. "Take it. Five thousand dollars. That's all I could raise. Policemen sometimes want to get rid of their wives too, you know."

He turned and walked away.

My fee is usually at least thirty thousand, but in his case I made an exception.

Lieutenant Morgan didn't know it, but he'd talked *himself* into being the victim!

MIKE'S MAIL

AVID READER

I have enjoyed MSMM for several years and I think it is fine as is.

I agree a weird story now and then is OK, but there are many other magazines on the market devoted exclusively to that type of story.

As a youngster I was an avid reader of G-8 & His Battle Aces, The Shadow, and The Spider (not the silly Spiderman of today, but Richard Wentworth, The Spider).

I understand there were some reprints made of these magazines in pocketbook form. Could you tell me where to write to obtain these books?

I have also enjoyed the advertisements in MSMM dealing with all the old time serials, most of which I have seen. What was the serial featuring the Flying Wing?

I find it interesting the way history repeats itself. Only a couple of years after the Flying Wing came on the screen, the United States Army Air Force was experimenting with what looked like a plane taken from the serial. Now the movie Firefox featuring an ultra sophisticated plane has made its appearance on the screen and I find that the United States Air Force has in its possession and is experimenting with a plane quite similar in design.

Keep up the good work with MSMM.

Thank you for any help you may give me regarding the books I am looking for.

Robert H. Dressler
4205 E. Thomas Road, #7
Phoenix, AZ 85018

A number of paperback publishers have reprinted series pulp characters: G-8 came out from Berkley; THE SHADOW was reprinted by Bantam and Pyramid; Berkley and Pocketbooks put out a few SPIDER novels; THE AVENGER came from Warner Paperback Library; Regency Books printed PHANTOM DETECTIVE; DOC SAVAGE was reissued by Bantam, who did about a hundred of them. I doubt that writing to the publishers would do you any good. Your best bet would be to haunt the used book shops and try rummage sales and thrift shops; that's how I got most of my collection. Perhaps some of our other MSMM readers can help, with information or even with spare copies they might like to sell.

Glad you like the movie serial ads. I think they're more interesting to look at than announcements of authors who might be in future issues. The Flying Wing was used by the arch criminal The Spider (no relation to Richard Wentworth) to carry his death ray against the Good Guys in the 1937 Republic serial DICK TRACY, starring Ralph Byrd as the famous detective.

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one thing left to do!*

The Final Appointment

by S. PATRICK

TOM DRAKE FELT STRANGELY OUT-OF-PLACE SITTING IN DR. Raymond's office now that he was no longer sick. During the years he had been coming here four times a week, the office had not changed at all. The same framed diplomas and quaint Currier and Ives prints hung from the walls, the padded chair still faced the mahogany desk as it had at that first visit, and the psychiatrist's gray tweed couch with its frayed edges remained in the southwest corner of the room. Even the scattered array of books and papers on Dr. Raymond's desk seemed not to have been disturbed in all that time. Tom had gradually matured and overcome his crippling mental problems, but the office had stayed the same. He had always thought of it as a bastion of constancy as opposed to his own turbulent, unpredictable emotions.

But those horrible days were past, and his illness was now little more than painful memories and reams of notes in the doctor's battered filing cabinet.

Slowly, with a steadily mounting conviction, he had come to believe that his enemies communicated with each other via television soap operas. Tom had spent endless hours watching the afternoon dramas in a desperate effort to decode their deadly messages. Everything else

in his life had lost its importance in the face of his obsession.

"Paranoia," Dr. Raymond had said in his deep, calm voice at the close of their first session together. "But I think that I can help you with intensive therapy. You're only twenty-one, Tom. Youth is on your side."

And the doctor had been true to his word. After many months of sifting through his past, uncovering repressed memories, and painfully examining his relationships with others, Tom had been led to see that the supposed value of his discovery was merely a delusion, a demented attempt to give his life meaning. The potion he had concocted did not create gasoline when added to water — only an amber-colored liquid, totally worthless. Now, Tom realized this, but, at the time, he would have killed to protect his brainchild from the imagined conspirators.

Tom's gaze came to rest on the heavy wooden carvings of Don Quixote and his fat squire, Sancho Panza, that stood on the psychiatrist's desk. Don Quixote, tall and emaciated, a symbol of romantic madness in the face of Sancho Panza's practical realism. Quixote had attacked windmills he'd mistaken for giants with whirling arms and battled a herd of sheep he'd believed to be a great army.

Yes, Tom reflected as he ran a steady hand through his blonde hair, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza were appropriate figures to reside in Dr. Raymond's office.

THERE WAS A SOUND AT THE DOOR, AND DR. RAYMOND abruptly stepped into the office. He was a middle-aged man, pot-bellied and slightly stoop-shouldered with receding brown hair and wire-rimmed glasses. "Good afternoon, Tom," he said as he slipped into his chair behind the desk. "How are you today?"

Tom smiled at his savior and replied, "I've never felt better."

"I'm delighted to hear that. It pleases me greatly that your analysis has been so successful and that it is now time for termination."

"You've saved my life, doctor. You've made it possible for me to go back to work and try to pick up the pieces of my life. I owe you more than money could ever repay."

Dr. Raymond tried to appear unaffected by the gratitude, but his lips twitched into a half-smile. "Don't underestimate your own contribution to the process, Tom," he said. "You've worked hard. In reality, you brought about your own change, while I simply served as a guide to your unconscious."

"I couldn't have done it without you."

"Actually, I'm as pleased as you are with our success. Paranoia has a somewhat bleak prognosis, and yours is one of the few real cures I've ever encountered. You can be sure that this is a day I'll long remember."

Dr. Raymond stared at Tom with undisguised affection, then added, "You know that you can contact me for further sessions if any problems arise in the future. I'm keeping your records, of course, and I'll always find room in my schedule to meet with you."

"I appreciate that, doctor, but I really don't think it will be necessary. I feel wonderful."

"Well, then, I believe we can say good-bye," said Dr. Raymond, rising from his chair.

Tom stood and gripped the doctor's extended hand warmly. "Thank you again from the bottom of my heart, Dr. Raymond."

"You're most welcome. And here is your last bill. I'm sure you won't miss receiving these."

Dr. Raymond turned to lift the slip of paper from the top of his filing cabinet. At the same instant, Tom grabbed the heavy carving of Don Quixote, stepped around the desk, and smashed the figure down onto the psychiatrist's head. Dr. Raymond groaned and sagged to his knees. Mustering all of his strength, Tom struck him again. This time the force of the blow cracked off Quixote's head, and it rolled beneath the desk. Breathing heavily, Tom placed the broken carving beside Sancho Panza.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Raymond," he murmured, stepping over the psychiatrist and yanking open a drawer in the filing cabinet. He thumbed quickly through the names until he found his own, then snatched the bulky folder from its slot.

Tom looked down at the psychiatrist, and sorrow creased his face. "I just couldn't take a chance letting you live considering all that you know about me," he said in a choked voice. "Who knows to what extremes those lunatics might have gone to pump information from you once my new discovery is made public? After all, tablets that change water into wine will be worth millions."

Tom paused to survey the office one last time. Except for the crumpled body on the floor and the headless carving, things appeared exactly the same as they had three years before.

Then Tom closed the door behind him and walked casually from the building. Glancing at his watch, he suddenly quickened his pace.

In only fifteen minutes, the afternoon cartoons would begin, and he couldn't afford to miss the latest secret communiques between his enemies.

Stiff Competition

BOOK REVIEWS by JOHN BALL

When we learned that *The Ariadne Clue* by Carol Clemeau had won the prestigious Scribner Crime Novel Award, we looked forward to the book very much. The contest drew a great many manuscripts of first novels (as specified), so the winner clearly would have to be something special. It is.

The work deals with ancient Greek culture and art, a great deal of which is included in the text. Since the author has been a professor of classics for fifteen years, her background material is rock solid. The story itself starts off slowly: some pieces from a forecoming exhibition of antique art are stolen, with suspicion falling on a graduate student who chooses the same time to disappear. Not a great deal happens for the next hundred pages: a single policeman appears, asks a few questions, and that is all. No suspense whatever is in evidence. But Professor Clemeau is busy loading her cannon; she is putting in the gunpowder, ball, and wadding and ramming it all home in preparation for her finale.

When the explosion comes it is a dandy. From there on in the reader will be glued to the pages as the author switches, surprises, and solves, all still in the vein of the classic world of antiquity. We have no way of knowing what was in the other manuscripts submitted, but this

one is a winner on any basis. Don't pass it by. (Scribners, \$12.95)



I. I. Magdalen (a pseudonym) is a former member of the intelligence services who has produced a new spy novel called *The Search for Anderson*. An agent whose personal life is in considerable disarray is given a single slender clue and then sent to pursue an elusive man known only as Anderson. The way he runs his target down is engaging, although the author writes in a style that is something like viewing slides of various interesting parts of the world via a projector with a broken lens: there are some fascinating glimpses, but most of them are fragments and the reader is often left to guess what exactly is going on. The story follows more or less conventional lines for the spy drama, not forgetting the quibbling over expense accounts. The final solution is somewhat unconventional, but it wraps things up about as the reader expects. A bit more clarity would perhaps have given the story a firmer grip in the reader's mind. But perhaps things are like that in the shadow world of espionage. (St. Martins, \$11.95)



When Dr. Watson ceased to write about Sherlock Holmes, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle turned his mind to other matters, the loss was almost beyond endurance. Into the gap stepped the gifted August Derleth with his tribute to the Master; over a forty year period he contributed 68 stories about Solar Pons and Dr. Lyndon Parker who were created to walk, in tribute, in the footsteps of the immortals. Instead of Baker Street it became Praed Street, but the deerstalker was still there, the penetrating deductions, and the technique that the Baker Street Irregulars hold in such reverent awe.

Now that Mr. Derleth has followed Sir Arthur across the border, Arkham House has produced a publishing triumph: the complete Solar Pons canon in a splendid, well illustrated two-volume edition presented in a handsome slipcase. The type is a bit small, but with this single reservation, here is an offering that belongs, absolutely, in every mystery collection to be read and reread with joy and gratification. It is called *The Solar Pons Omnibus* and you want it. (Arkham House Publishers, Sauk City, Wisconsin, \$39.95)



Martina D'Alton makes her debut as a novelist with *Fatal Finish*, which has a lot to do with marathon running. Miss D'Alton is herself a marathoner, which commands respect, and she obviously knows a great deal about long distance running. Her story, however, is a rather thin one involving an incident at the end of World War II and its present day repercussions. There is a prompt death which the reader clearly understands to be murder, but nothing very much happens after that for a considerable time and the element of suspense is minimal. The ending is tied to the Boston Marathon, but interest in the race is not enough to cover a clearly foreseeable ending that holds no surprises for the reader. Regretfully, we recommend a pass. (Walker and Co., \$11.95)



An annual event of continuing interest is the regular appearance of *The Year's Best Mystery and Suspense Stories*. The 1982 collection maintains the high standards of its predecessors under the editorship of Edward D. Hoch, the prolific short story writer who, if memory serves, has appeared in every issue of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* since 1972. Mr. Hoch, in addition to being a fine fellow indeed, is also currently the president of the Mystery Writers of America. The author list herein is very distinguished. This book is a collection to buy, to read, and to keep. (Walker and Co., \$12.95)



While on the subject of collections, a most interesting one is Ellery Queen's *Book of First Appearances* which contains such classics as Stanley Ellin's *The Specialty of the House* and Harry Kemelman's *The Nine Mile Walk*, one of the finest tales of pure logic ever written. The maiden efforts of many other now notable authors are included in this generous selection of 27 widely assorted tales. Mr. Queen's taste was always extraordinarily fine, and it is so here. (The Dial Press, \$12.95)



PAPERBACK NOTES: Another classic back in print is Marjorie Carlton's *Vanished*, which deserves the praise it has received. \$2.50 well spent for a fine story. The author of the memorable *The Rosary Murders* gives us another bell ringer in *Mind Over Murder*. Don't miss this one, it's a dandy, Bantam \$2.95.



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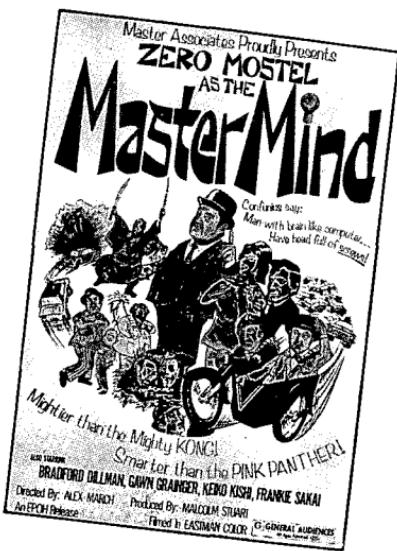
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